

CELEBRATING OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY

**7 Great
American
Beach Towns**

PAGE 44

 **NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC**

TRAVELER

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June/July 2014

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER

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BY NAGELESTOCK.COM/
ALAMY



Beach memory: flying a kite in Massachusetts

Shore Thing: America's Beach Towns

THE ICON OF MY CHILDHOOD summers was a briny stretch of sand scant feet from our shingled rental cottage about a mile out from the beach town of Chatham, Massachusetts—which in my youth consisted of little more than a post office, a general store with a soda fountain and rack of comics, and a shop filled with lobster traps, maritime tchotchkes, and driftwood. It exuded rustic unpretentiousness.

We answered Chatham's beachy call for four weeks every summer, all tumbling into the family car—four kids and our parents—for the 12-hour ride to Cape Cod. The cadence of those summers was exquisite. Think swimming, sailing, burying ourselves in waterlogged sand, and scavenging for periwinkles, horseshoe crabs, and other marine creatures (though I failed to persuade my mother to keep a small, beached sand shark as a pet).

I remember rainy nights and sunburned mornings. Family charades and drowsing off

to the sounds of the ocean. Being mesmerized by the oyster shuckers' deftness at Thompson's Clam Bar and entranced by the slap of the waves, Beatles tunes, the pungent smell of dune life, and the tasty comfort of clams and lobster boiled on a gas range in our sand-strewn cottage.

Chatham and its ocean fringes offered a life as simple as sunrise. Now I take my children to a different beach town, with the hope that they will create their own sandy memories. For your own taste of the shore, see our celebration of a handful of great American beach towns on page 44. (One of them happens to be Orleans, about ten miles north of Chatham.) Go wiggle your toes in the sand and take pleasure in the fact that the essential beach experience endures—if you know, as we do, where to find it.

— KEITH BELLOWS

Chatham and its ocean fringes offered a life as simple as sunrise. Now I take my children to a different beach town, for them to create their own sandy memories.

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TARA ISABELLA BURTON

WRITER, "A TOAST TO GEORGIA," PAGE 74

HOME: I divide my time between New York and Oxford, England. In New York, everything is constantly changing. Mired in tradition, Oxford is the opposite. Calling both places home helps me strike a balance.

GOING HYBRID: My mother is American, but she spent 20 years in France and Italy. My father is Italian. I grew up shuttling among New York, Paris, Rome, and other places. Growing up as a "third culture kid," as those of us with similar circumstances are often called, helps me to adapt as a traveler. I'm drawn to places that meld cultures and aesthetics, or seem to exist between worlds.



BONE UP: Among my more memorable Georgian experiences: taking a *marshrutka* (a beat-up minibus) with some friends to the remote mountain province of Khevsureti, near the Chechen border, famous for its pre-Christian customs. Most chilling were the unmarked bone crypts in Anatori, where plague victims self-quarantined. They're filled with human bones. It was grisly but fascinating.



AMY TOENSING

PHOTOGRAPHER (ABOVE), "IN PRAISE OF THE AMERICAN BEACH TOWN," PAGE 44

HOME: I live with my husband, who is also a photojournalist, in New Paltz, New York, in the Hudson Valley. Only 100 miles from New York City, it's the rock-climbing epicenter of the Northeast, close to mountains, trails, and swimming holes. We live to be outside.

FAMILY WAY: My husband's aunt and uncle live in Orleans [the Massachusetts beach town featured in this issue]. Orleans is a place where people have really invested in the community, and so experiencing it with our family was a perfect, real connection. Everyone in town knows them, and his uncle took us out at sunrise to get shots of the day's first light. We also went to outer beaches where locals hang out and barbecue clams. Watching many generations play together in the surf was beautiful.

LOCAL FLAVOR: I'm still laughing about a lunch I had at the Land Ho! restaurant in Orleans. The "hangover cure" tradition here is to order "a bloody and a stuffy," which admittedly sounds pretty gross but is a bloody Mary and an incredible stuffed clam.

AWE IN OZ: Most recently I photographed Aboriginal Australia for a *National Geographic* feature as well as for a forthcoming book. I'm excited to share these people's deep and profound connection to the land.

VADDEY RATNER

WRITER, MY CITY: PHNOM PENH, PAGE 28

HOME: My family has homes in a wooded neighborhood outside Washington, D.C., and amid the sugar palms and frangipanis in Siem Reap. We built the house in Cambodia from scratch, and I filled the grounds with the flowers and fruit trees of my childhood there—jasmine and jackfruit, milk fruit and mangosteen, and so many more.

PASSAGES: The first time I took my daughter to Siem Reap (in 2003), we stayed at Angkor Village, an urban resort made of traditional Cambodian-style homes on stilts. I was startled awake in the pitch-black night, only to realize that I had been crying. I didn't understand why. I could see nothing around me, yet the night felt familiar. Later, my mother reminded me that we'd been here during our escape to the border during the Khmer Rouge era. She'd told me to stay quiet to avoid detection by soldiers. It was as if I was finishing a rite begun 24 years earlier, to secretly grieve for those I'd lost.

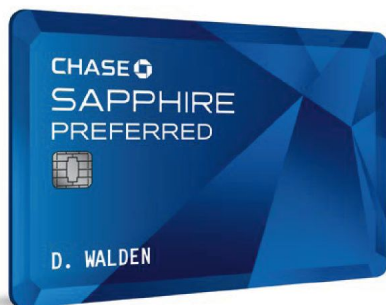


MASSIMO BASSANO (BURTON), MATT MOYER (TOENSING), VADDEY RATNER (RATNER)



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2X POINTS ON TRAVEL AND DINING AT RESTAURANTS.

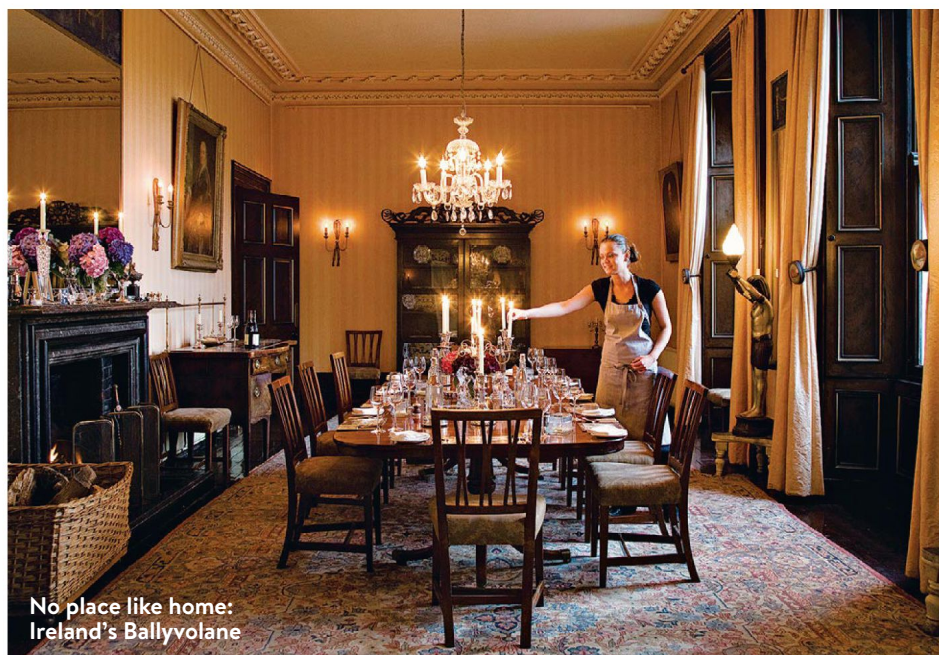
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No place like home:
Ireland's Ballyvolane

Another Round on the House

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WITH ITS MOODY SKIES and friendly people, Ireland conjures up plenty of travel romance, and writer Turtle Bunbury's love of country guesthouses ("At Home in Ireland," April 2014) made hearts soar. "I spent months in Ireland and feel I know the place pretty well, but I enjoyed learning about these country houses," wrote subscriber Libbie Griffin of **New Bern, N.C.** "The best discovery was that staying at them isn't as expensive as I would have thought. I'll definitely visit one or more on my next trip to Ireland."

Iva Foster of **Burleson, Tex.**, was similarly enchanted but also commented on the provenance of the name of Ballyvolane House in County Cork, one of the featured inns: "Mr. Bunbury says that its name means 'place of the springing heifer' and mentions a young cow's 'dutiful skip.' I wonder, though, how Irish cattle people think of springing. In Texas, we use the term for a cow about to calve. To me, then, Ballyvolane is a particularly fertile—and therefore successful—place."

BOOK LUST Is it possible for a traveler to love any book as much as a passport? "Around the World in 80 Books" (April 2014) proposes some worthy contenders. "I would add to your list *Dark Star Safari* by Paul Theroux. His saga of traveling from Cairo to Cape Town covered much of the Africa I recently visited," wrote Joan Miller of **Worthington, Ohio**. "And another book that allowed me to revisit two of my favorite cities, Florence and Istanbul, was Dan Brown's *Inferno*. Who cares about the story? The descriptions of place were just as fun."

ICEBREAKER Wilderness travel often requires careful footing (as does publishing a magazine story). Sometimes literally: Photos of teens on floating ice patches in Glacier National Park's Iceberg Lake ("Parks and Re-Creation," April 2014) upset John Isom of **Los Banos, Calif.**: "I have hiked the trail to this alpine lake many times. The icy waters are dangerous, and walking and jumping on icebergs is foolhardy."

"People always ask about the 'Mona Lisa' or other well-known sights, but getting lost and really discovering a place are the stories you're dying to tell."

—NIC HILDITCH-SHORT ON "ARE MUSEUMS OVERRATED?" (ONLINE)

PANAMA-DEMONIUM The February/March 2014 issue announced the imminent opening of Panama City's BioMuseo. Much to our chagrin, though, the stop-and-go project hit another red light after the magazine went to press. Open for limited tours, the still-not-finished museum disappointed Herman Oosterwijk of **Cross Roads, Tex.**, who read the article before a trip to Panama City. But, like the evolutionary history the BioMuseo aims to chronicle, Oosterwijk adapted: "I still enjoyed the city and found it affordable and easy to get around, without a lot of tourists. Visiting the old city and taking a boat through the Panama Canal locks were highlights."



CAMERA SLY

In response to our April 2014 Adventure 101 primer on snorkeling Australia's Great Barrier Reef (above), **Cairns** outfitter Phil Warring added a photo tip gleaned from experience: "Make sure you have a strap for your underwater camera! Seen a few go missing of late."

JAMES FENNEL (DINING ROOM), RODGER KLEIN/WPICS/REDUX (REEF)



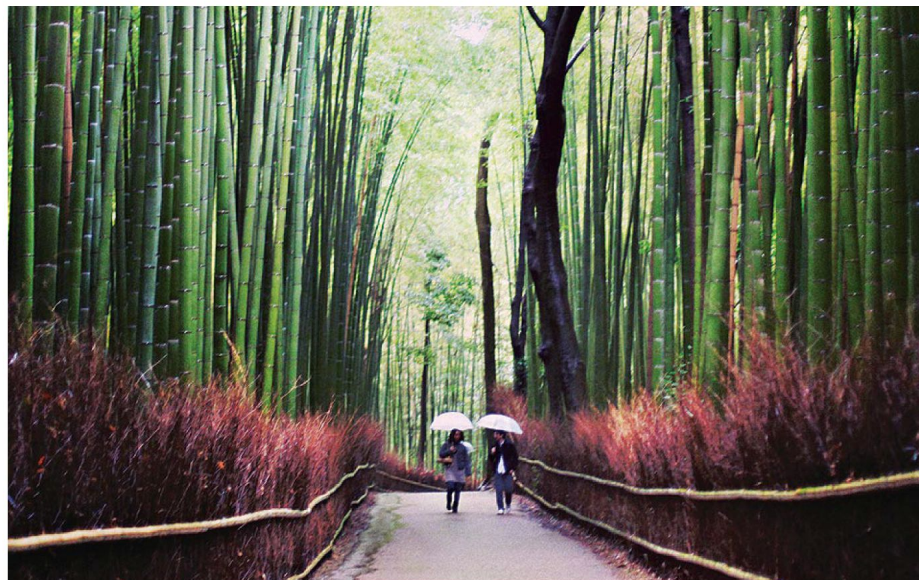
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HOT SHOTS

So You Think You Can Photograph?

Join the club: The Your Shot photo community brings together National Geographic editors with shutterbugs of all abilities to go on digital assignment. But that's not all. Bookmark natgeotravel.tumblr.com for daily eye candy and behind-the-lens interviews and follow @NatGeoTravel on Instagram; tag your favorite shots with #natgeotravelpic for chances to be featured weekly (such as the Kyoto image above by @anna_goldberg). Best yet, enter the *Traveler* Photo Contest by June 30 (\$15 fee) for travel and photo prizes.

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EXPEDITIONS

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A safari is the stuff of bucket lists. A National Geographic safari blows the checklist off the map. Whether walking in Tanzania's wilderness with the Maasai (right), tracking tigers in India, sharing an African adventure with the whole family, or jetting to the world's top wildlife zones (from the Himalaya to the Maldives), travelers encounter legendary creatures on their home turf while learning from renowned biologists and conservationists. Trips appeal to many interests and levels of physical ability.

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INITIATIVES

OCEAN CONSERVATION FLOATS OUR BOAT

Whether circumnavigating Iceland or discovering the South Pacific, travelers aboard the *National Geographic Orion* and *Explorer* ships see the world through the lens of scientists and adventurers. Now they can also help protect it. National Geographic and partner Lindblad Expeditions have announced a five-year program to donate funds raised on the ships to the Pristine Seas project. Led by Explorer-in-Residence Enric Sala, the initiative supports ocean conservation projects in vulnerable ecosystems such as West Africa (below, an artificial reef on a Gabon oil platform attracts a moray eel).



SOCIAL CUES

Can't Stop Talking

The digital revolution has sparked endless ways to keep the chatter going beyond the pages of *Traveler*. Magazine personalities host Twitter chats the second Tuesday of every month @NatGeoTravel; follow #enroute to shape the conversation. Elsewhere in the digital travel world: Facebook fans find and offer travel tips from our global community (1.5 million strong). And during live-streamed Google+ Hangouts on Air, participants can watch staff on location and ask questions in real time.



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Chiapas *for* NATURE LOVERS

A tropical land delivers a double shot of inspiration and adrenaline as it beckons with culture, adventure, and natural beauty.



You're hanging onto a zip line, skimming a jungle canopy one day, climbing a vine-wreathed ancient pyramid the next. Two days later you find yourself sitting down to a plate of fresh tamales mole in a colonial city filled with architectural splendors. You're in Chiapas—Mexico's extreme southern state—and the week you'd planned suddenly seems too short.

Discover the People

You've heeded the call and are now immersing yourself in a rich culture that extends well back into pre-Hispanic times. Indiana Jonesing for adventure, you're heading to the Lacandon Jungle to walk amid the ancient Maya archaeological wonders. As you gaze at carved stone temples, colorful murals, and monolithic stelae preserved for centuries, you imagine vivid scenes of feasting and royal ceremony. Afterward, in one of the state's many villages, you get to know the locals and their long-standing heritage, while listening to the lilting tones of the marimba and enjoying their flavorful traditional cuisine.

Explore the Land

You've been told the only way to really know Chiapas is to get out into the natural world. So you've brought your binoculars on a hike or backpacking trip into Nahá and Metzabok, two protected areas within the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. You're looking for a jaguar, or maybe an ocelot—at a good distance. You hear an unmistakable caw, see a flash of color, and there it is, winging to a tall ceiba tree: a stunning green-billed toucan. You take a picture and continue on your way.

Around the next bend, howler monkeys cavort high above, their roaring voices echoing through the misty rain forest. You try to snap the moment, but they're moving too fast, and a monarch butterfly alighting on a wild orchid distracts you. Maybe something blurred to show your friends back home while you tell the story of how you might have glimpsed a jungle cat, but definitely saw something just as wonderful.

Find Yourself

You know it's time to put yourself out there. To go to extremes. Find out what you've got. Okay, so you're rappelling in Sumidero Canyon, down to a place you could never get to otherwise. This time, in your excitement, you've forgotten your camera; you'll just have to remember every detail. Later on, you're rafting through a frothy stretch of the La Venta River, and then one of your companions says, "Tomorrow we're caving."

Soon enough you're creeping through the caverns at Misol Ha. Your reward will be the aquamarine pool at the foot of a thundering 100-foot waterfall. If only you had time for some climbing on the soaring stone arches of El Arcotete. But you'd rather take your final day on a sunny Pacific beach, recounting your adventures in Chiapas.



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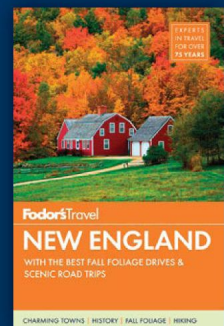
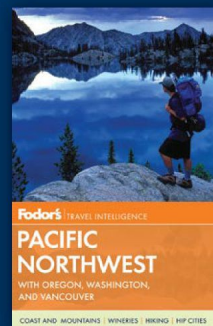
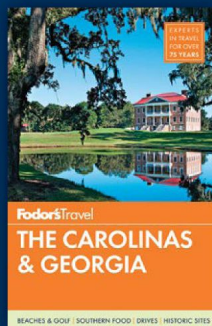
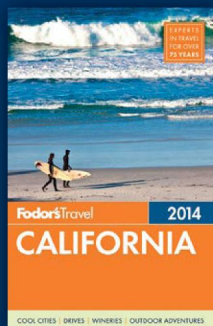
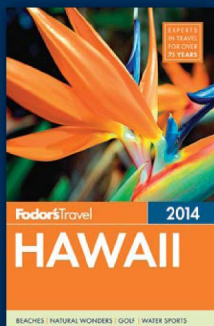
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WHERE TO GO NOW

BEST OF THE WORLD

"It was easy to imagine [the rock towers] to be the colossal ruins of a temple dedicated to some Alpine Isis."

—GEORGE DIXON ABRAHAM

Monte Paterno frames the three peaks of Lavaredo in the Italian Dolomites.

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Bonito, Brazil 24

Solstice crowds at Stonehenge



England's Return to the Stone Age

STONEHENGE HAS LONG drawn pilgrims on sacred days. Now a new visitors center has transformed the tradition in time for the summer solstice on June 21. Thousands of revelers—including caped druids, antler-wearing poets, and raggedy mummers—descend on the ancient stones to greet the year's longest day. It's one of few occasions when people are allowed to stand inside the circle. In this ritual bridging the millennia, devotees can glimpse the sun rising behind the famed Heel Stone (a single slab in the prehistoric avenue beside the stones). This year, Stonehenge crowds will find restored dignity thanks to sweeping grassland and uninterrupted views of what Siegfried Sassoon called "the roofless past." The northern

road that sliced through the historic land is gone, as are the shabby welcome facilities. Located a discreet 1.5 miles from the site, the canopied visitors center features an aerial video map as well as a 360-degree panorama that lets travelers "stand in the stones" any time of year and watch the seasons and centuries roll by. "Within the stones you become distinctly aware that you're in the presence of Neolithic people," says archaeologist and author Francis Pryor. "You catch yourself looking over your shoulder, thinking someone's standing beside you—but it's a bluestone. It's quite eerie." —**JULIANA GILLING**

■ **TIP: TO REACH STONEHENGE FROM THE VISITORS CENTER, SKIP THE BUS RIDE AND FOLLOW FIELD TRAILS PASSING BURIAL MOUNDS.**

ATLAS

Stonehenge, England



Believed to have been dragged here from Wales, each Stonehenge bluestone weighs roughly four tons.



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Cooperstown's Baseball Hall of Fame tracks current standings.

Where Diamonds Are Forever

NO NEED FOR AN UMPIRE'S CALL: Cooperstown, New York, runs on baseball. And as the Baseball Hall of Fame celebrates its 75th anniversary on June 12, baseball lovers can cheer more than one milestone. July also brings a new batch of inductees (including star players Frank Thomas, Greg Maddux, and Tom Glavine) following last year's steroids-disqualified dry spell. But some things never change: The induction ceremony draws an endless stream of baseball fanatics from across the country, who hold their caps and grow misty-eyed when approaching their heroes. Living legends recount locker room pranks from their signing tables at baseball card shops and stroll together through manicured gardens to the 105-year-old

Otesaga Resort Hotel. "Cooperstown is like visiting the old days," says Yogi Berra, the patriarchal former Yankees catcher. All summer long, youth teams arrive in caravans soap-painted "Cooperstown or Bust" to test their mettle at Dreams Park. Yet many visitors leave without realizing that this village hits all the bases in the arts, too—from the Fenimore Art Museum to Glimmerglass, a lakeside opera festival named for what native writer James Fenimore Cooper called Otsego Lake. Music-loving Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg usually attends and sometimes gives lectures. —**SASCHA ZUGER**

■ **TIP:** CATCH A FREE FIREWORKS SHOW EACH THURSDAY NIGHT AT DREAMS PARK, FOLLOWING WEEKLY YOUTH BASEBALL GAMES.

ATLAS

Cooperstown, New York



The claim of baseball's birthplace dates to a hoax that Civil War hero Abner Doubleday invented the sport here in 1839.

West Virginia

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Hikers traverse the Via Ferrata Tridentina in the Italian Dolomites.

Moving On Up in the Dolomites

WHEN WORLD WAR I broke out, Italy's Dolomites became a treacherous front line for Austrian and Italian soldiers. Here among the jagged peaks and sheer pastel walls of this ancient range of the Alps, where many cultures had coexisted for centuries, soldiers on both sides built networks of bolted-down steel cables, called *via ferrata* (iron path), to move supplies quickly—and for other missions, too. “Soldiers came down the mountains at night to exchange family news with their relatives,” says hiking guide Karin Pizzinini. As the world marks the war’s centennial, travelers can explore the same transport system. Anchored cables bolster the original ladders, and local outfitters provide necessary gear and pair

experienced guides with many skill levels. Near the ski village of Cortina d’Ampezzo (about a 3.5-hour trip by bus and train from Venice), the beginner-friendly Via Ferrata Averau awards vistas of the massive towers of the Cinque Torri. At the base, an outdoor museum preserving the World War I headquarters of an artillery unit details the human side of war, from personal diaries to tales of winter survival. All together, several museums and a 50-mile ski tour commemorate the Dolomites’ role in the Great War. Here, says Pizzinini, “you can not only climb the via ferrata but truly know why they’re here.” —**JENNIFER WILSON**

■ **TIP: RENT A ROOM IN THE RENOVATED RIFUGIO AVERAU, A MOUNTAIN HUT WITH TERRACE VIEWS OF THE MARMOLADA GLACIER.**

ATLAS

Dolomites, Italy



In 2010, a hiker happened upon the mummified remains of a World War I soldier frozen into a glacier in the Dolomites.

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Communal dining at D.C.'s Union Market

United We Eat in the Nation's Capital

HOPING TO WITNESS democracy in action in Washington, D.C.? Head to Union Market, a new seat of culinary power northeast of the Capitol that's as much of a throwback as it is progressive. Here in an up-and-coming neighborhood known as NoMA (north of Massachusetts Avenue), what was once a gloomy warehouse has been transformed into a bright gathering place. With 40-some local vendors, Union Market follows the tradition of 19th-century markets that once pulsed at the heart of American cities, including D.C.'s historic Center Market, which made way for the National Archives in 1931. Today's urban market exemplifies the booming capital's new grassroots food culture—rife with collaborations and chefs working the

counter—helping D.C. shed its dated reputation as one giant steak house. Shoppers examine crates of arugula while sampling Korean BBQ tacos, slurping Chesapeake oysters and egg creams, or downing Ethiopian espresso and perhaps a bite of baklava. "Union Market has given a lot of creative people the opportunity to pursue their ambitions on a small scale," says Michael Babin, the restaurateur behind 16 Washington restaurants and bars, including the market's Red Apron Butchery, where regional beers pair with *porchetta* sandwiches. "D.C.'s food scene finally feels like a scene." —**DAVID HAGEDORN**

■ **TIP:** GRAB AN ITALIAN SUB AT A. LITTERI, A SMALL GROCERY A BLOCK FROM UNION MARKET SERVING WASHINGTON INSIDERS SINCE 1926.

ATLAS

District of Columbia



D.C. drivers protest their lack of a vote in Congress with their license plates, stamped "Taxation Without Representation."

INTERNATIONAL MAPPING

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Into the Anhumas Abyss in Bonito, Brazil

Spotlight on Bonito: Wet Is Best

IT'S NOT EASY to get out from under the shadow of a place like Brazil's Pantanal—a natural wetland bigger than England and home to a biodiversity bonanza of such rare species as the tapir and the jaguar. Yet the town of Bonito, on the Pantanal's border, is emerging as one of Brazil's favorite adventure outposts, no longer the secret of wayfarers who stopped here for rest en route to the wetland. With its clear blue rivers filtered by limestone, this small enclave particularly attracts outdoors lovers. Bonito's rivers, such as the Prata, stage a rare snorkeling experience—a freshwater version of the Caribbean, where aquatic plants stand in for coral and teem with rainbows of fish. At the Anhumas Abyss, thrill seekers

drop into a tiny opening in the forest floor and rappel 236 feet to swim in crystalline waters underground. After adrenaline-filled days, travelers retire to guesthouses that make up for any lack of luxury with local comforts, such as the hammocks and breakfasts at Pousada Galeria Artes, sourced from a nearby ranch. Indeed, Bonito could be a case study in the power of travel to protect nature. Local tourism and environmental councils work hand in hand, as they have for more than two decades, to manage impacts on the fragile ecosystem and to support conservation efforts with visitor revenue. —COSTAS CHRIST

■ TIP: WATCH RED-AND-GREEN MACAWS FLY IN TO ROOST AT SUNSET AT BURACO DAS ARARAS, NEAR THE CAMPO GRANDE AIRPORT.

ATLAS

Bonito, Brazil



Bonito's Mysterious Lagoon has been measured to 721 feet deep—but divers have never hit bottom.

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NAVIGATING THE GLOBE

SMART TRAVELER

**“Despite its breathtaking
pace of transformation, this is
still, for me, a city of echoes,
reverberations of the past.”**

—VADDEY RATNER
ON PHNOM PENH

Inside

My City: Phnom Penh 28
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Cambodian
monks at the
entrance of the
National Museum
in Phnom Penh

PAGE 28

Khmer color:
badminton at Neak
Banh Teuk Park; a
seafood dish at Malis
restaurant (below)



MY CITY

Phnom Penh Crossroads

IN THE FAST-FORWARD CAMBODIAN CAPITAL, THE PAST STILL HAUNTS By VADDEY RATNER

"MAMA, DO YOU SEE that echo?" my daughter asked. "On the wall there, looking at me." She was three years old, and it was her first visit to Phnom Penh, the city of my birth. "Why are there so many in Cambodia?"

I followed her gaze, where she had spied a gecko clinging to a high corner. In her innocent mispronunciation, she'd touched on something I felt was hauntingly apropos: Despite its breathtaking pace of transformation, this is still, for me, a city of echoes, reverberations of the past.

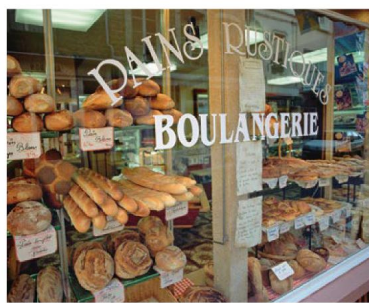
At the Hotel Le Royal, where we'd taken refuge from the city's bustle during our stay, lizards scaled the walls, and monkeys still ventured from the frangipani trees to steal room keys and fruit from poolside lounge chairs (the monkeys have since been moved to the city zoo). The scene recalled the verdant grounds of my own family estate in the middle of the city, where as a young girl I

always had to be on the lookout for sly characters descending from the trees amid the festive din of mealtimes in the garden.

There are echoes too of generations before, as in the Elephant Bar at Hotel Le Royal, where one can imagine the likes of Somerset Maugham and André Malraux, intellectuals and explorers, archaeologists and collectors, discussing in these smoke-filled rooms what to pillage and what to preserve in the fading days of the French protectorate. And in the black-and-white tiled hallway just outside, visitors peer into a display case of elegant cocktail glasses commissioned for the visit of Jacqueline Kennedy in 1967.

So much was destroyed in the war and revolution that emptied Phnom Penh of its residents and plunged the country into genocide in the 1970s that it is all the more striking that such fragile physical remnants should survive. Today one can stroll





I Heart Québec City

Andrew Evans, National Geographic's Digital Nomad, travels to every corner of the world. Here, he shares what he loves most about a favorite destination—Québec City.



"You can't beat the 400-year-old Vieux-Québec. There's nothing else like it in North America!"

Which neighborhoods captivated you most?

You can't beat the 400-year-old Vieux-Québec. There's nothing else like it in North America! Inside the impressive city walls you'll find amazing antiques stores, European-style cafés, offbeat shopping, and terrific river views. I also love the Old Port for people-watching and restaurants. A lesser-known, but very up-and-coming area, is La Basse-Ville (lower town) where the art scene is fresh and fun.

What impressed you most?

The city's architecture always astonishes me—it's so surprising to find this much history on every street. Add the infectious French hospitality, and Québec City makes a remarkable vacation.

What makes the people of Québec City so unique?

Québec is inherently French and its French-speaking locals are filled with a real joie de vivre. This becomes especially apparent during the big summer festivals like Festival d'été de Québec and Les Fêtes de la Nouvelle-France.

What is there to do outdoors?

Québec City is surrounded by beautiful parks. One of my favorites, Le Parc de la Chute-Montmorency, offers great hiking through rocky bluffs and beautiful woodlands up to a waterfall. I also loved L'île d'Orléans, an island in the river where you can walk, visit vineyards, pick your own apples and other fruits, and see local vinegars produced.

As a photographer, what did you capture?

Québec City is so visually stunning, it's hard to take a bad picture. The iconic Château Frontenac towers over all, while the Citadel overlooks the Plains of Abraham right in the heart of the city. Morning, noon, or evening, the shifting sunlight brightens the colored houses, painting the city with European charm.

You have 72 hours to spend in Québec City. What are your must-sees?

Definitely explore the Old City, take a tour of the Château Frontenac and walk around the outside terrace for the view. Stroll the Plains of Abraham and take a cruise down the St. Lawrence River. Explore the Petit-Champlain area, and Saint-Roch, for the groovy boutiques and outstanding restaurants. Le Musée de l'Amérique Française is my favorite museum, and don't miss the cathedral.

I Heart Québec City

Discover more about Québec City from National Geographic experts in the new feature section **I Heart Québec City**, launching June 3, 2014 at nationalgeographic.com/i-heart-quebec-city.





A wedding procession makes its way along the Tonle Sap riverfront.

among the colonial mansions lining the streets around the Royal Palace, and visit the ornate iron pavilion assembled on the palace grounds as a gift from Napoleon III. Across the way is the National Museum, with its graceful multi-tiered wooden roof that for years housed a massive bat colony, bedeviling the efforts of curators trying to preserve the Angkorian sculptures below.

A few steps from the National Museum, along a thoroughfare of family-owned galleries, is Reyum, an arts collective that encourages youths to give meaning to their troubled pasts by reinterpreting traditional forms of painting and sculpture. Tucked in a side road around the corner is the non-profit Friends restaurant, which provides on-the-job training for

■ GO TO INTELLIGENTTRAVEL.NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM FOR "I HEART MY CITY" POSTS.

young people, some of whom are former street children. A short walk behind the palace brings the visitor to Street 240, a row of shops offering fine crafts, silks, and the uniquely Cambodian concoction of Belgian chocolate sprinkled with Kampot pepper.

Not far beyond, at the convergence of boulevards bearing the names of kings, rises the Independence Monument. Among my most precious memories, I recall, as a girl of four or five, walking here with my father. He would tell me stories that would stay with me in the ensuing years of chaos, stories I would invoke in quiet moments during my struggle to survive. If you arrive early enough in the cool morning hours, you will find the park here filled with people, young and old, rich and poor, ministers and students and street

vendors, walking, playing badminton, catching a moment's rest, or exchanging stories before the start of another busy day.

While the city is frenetically rebuilding in what feels like a race to make up for lost time, this is a land of survivors, where each of us is shadowed by our own particular collection of echoes. To the casual observer, the history of opulence and tragedy, artistic achievement and suffering compressed into just a few generations may feel irreconcilable. Yet, for those willing to listen and inquire, the city is full of clues marking junctures where our collective histories intersect, places that remind us what we've lost, and what might endure.

VADDEY RATNER is the author of the bestselling novel *In the Shadow of the Banyan*.

ATLAS

Phnom Penh, Cambodia



Cambodia has 27 public holidays a year (the U.S. has 10), including Khmer New Year, the king's birthday, and Victory Over Genocidal Regime Day.

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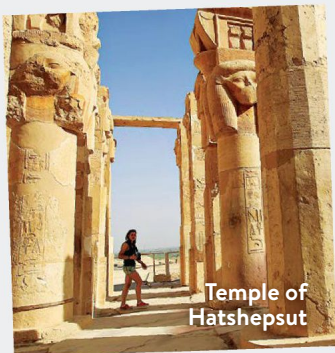
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Temple of Hatshepsut

DIGITAL NOMAD EGYPT: THE CASE FOR GOING

By ANDREW EVANS

I have never received as many concerned messages as I did on a recent trip to **EGYPT**. The nation has made headlines lately, and few have been positive. Realities on the ground in Luxor, though, were different. On my first morning in the ancient Egyptian capital, I went for a run. Every block or two I encountered Tourist Police. I greeted each with *salaam alaikum*—"peace be upon you." All replied with a heartfelt "peace." Other locals gave me a thumbs-up. Eight-year-old Akhmed shook my hand with joyful ferocity as he exclaimed, "Welcome to Egypt!"

Few Western tourists are visiting Luxor; I had some of the world's top archaeological sites—the temples of Karnak and Hatshepsut, the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings—almost to myself. Yes, visitors should be aware that Egypt is undergoing political change; there is turmoil. But should we stay away? Travel fosters the exchange of ideas, finds common ground, bridges cultural differences. The conflicts in parts of the Middle East are real, but Egypt has a sophisticated tourism infrastructure, a high level of security, and, based on my visit, a great desire to move forward. I'm already planning my return; I like being welcomed with open arms.

■ FOR MORE: DIGITALNOMAD.NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM AND [@WHERESEANDREW](https://twitter.com/wheresandrew)

ADVENTURE 101

Stand Up and Paddle

THE HOME-GROWN SPORT OF KAUAI, HAWAII By JILL K. ROBINSON

THE FASTEST-GROWING water sport in the world, stand-up paddling (SUP) was born in the Hawaiian Islands, and with calm jungle rivers and 50 miles of beaches, Kauai is one of the best places for the sport. "SUP is the marriage of the two most important water sports in Hawaiian culture: surfing and outrigger paddling," says Laird Hamilton, world-renowned big-wave surfer and master of crossover board sports.

GETTING STARTED

You don't need to be a gymnast to balance on the board and paddle at the same time. Stand with your feet hip distance apart and knees slightly bent, across the center of the board. Hold the paddle with the blade angled away from you. "With each stroke, put the blade in at the nose of the board, pull through the water with the paddle shaft vertical, and take the blade out at your feet," says Hamilton.

ON THE WATER

Wailua River: Smack in the middle of the island's eastern coast, the 20-mile Wailua River features jungle landscapes, natural lava grottoes, and cascading waterfalls. Hamilton compares the river to a "gentle slope on the mountain" for beginners, where protection from surf and wind makes it an optimal place to learn with outfitters such as Kayak Kauai.

Huleia River: South of Lihue, the Huleia River meanders from the inland refuge through Nawiliwili Harbor to meet the ocean, providing a variety of scenery and environments. Here, paddlers with Outfitters Kauai pass the serene Menehune Fish Pond, a stone-walled pond created a thousand years ago to trap fish; legend says a dam was built across a portion of the river overnight.



Green sea turtle



Gliding in Hawaii

Hanalei River: Head to the north shore to paddle the Hanalei River past emerald taro fields and river banks filled with hibiscus out into Hanalei Bay, a crescent-shaped beach with views of Makana peak (aka Bali Hai).

WHEN TO GO

April through October is Kauai's dry season, best for sunny days and calmer seas and great for beginner coastal paddling, where smaller surf and flat conditions are desirable. Year-round, hawksbill turtles, green sea turtles, and pods of Hawaiian spinner dolphins are found along the coast.

ESSENTIAL GEAR

Outfitters and rental shops provide boards and paddles for about \$45 per day. For beginners, the larger boards with traction pads provide more stability. Neoprene water shoes protect feet from rocks and sea urchins. Hamilton suggests bringing a waterproof camera—strapped to your wrist or secured with a flotation device—to capture Kauai's coastal view.

ATLAS

Kauai, Hawaii



Kauai is the backdrop to many Hollywood movies, including *South Pacific*, *Jurassic Park*, and even *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

MORE SUP SPOTS

1) **Lake Tahoe** Along the Nevada border, the shallow, rocky coves of Sand Harbor allow for easy paddling. 2) **Florida Keys** The Cow Key Channel, between Stock Island and Key West, takes paddlers through mangrove forest and tidal creeks.



Phone booth
in Ålesund,
Norway

PROBLEM SOLVED

Pay Less to Phone Home

By CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Q. I'm taking a two-week trip to Norway. How do I inexpensively call family back home? Don't purchase a pricey international plan from your wireless carrier. For example, AT&T's least expensive rate costs an extra \$30 per month and charges \$1 a minute for your calls in Scandinavia. Instead, when you get to your destination, buy a SIM card or a phone that offers cheap data and make all of your calls on Skype, Google, or Viber (which won't cost extra). SIM cards essentially make your phone go native in the country you are in. Telenor, the Norwegian national carrier, offers these cards for about \$10 a month for data-only service. It's superior to a phone call because you can actually show your loved ones back home the hand-carved troll you picked up at the Etnemarknaden.

Q. I fly two to three times a year. At what point does it make sense for me to sign up for

NEED HELP?

Editor at Large Christopher Elliott is our consumer advocate and the author of *How to Be the World's Smartest Traveler* (National Geographic Books).

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TSA PreCheck programs? The Transportation Security Administration hopes the answer is: right now. The agency's apparent goal is for every air traveler to plunk down \$85 for a five-year PreCheck membership, which is the agency's "trusted traveler" program. The benefit? You get screened as if it's 1999. Your shoes stay on, your liquids remain in the carry-on bag—and best of all, you don't have to deal with the prospect of walking through a full-body scanner or getting an "enhanced" pat-down. If your time is valuable to you, and you travel more than twice every year, it's probably worth the money. But here's something else to consider: You might get sent to the fast lane anyway. TSA's stated goal is to increase the "trusted traveler" lanes and focus on high-risk passengers. It's begun waving regular folks without PreCheck privileges into the quicker line, including, ahem, yours truly. So, for now, I intend to hold on to my money.

STRANGE PLANET

SHE AIN'T HEAVY At the annual Wife Carrying World Championships in Sonkajärvi, Finland, contestants are said to need "strength, tenacity, eroticism, and rhythm." **SHAKY START** The handshake goes back at least as far as ancient Greece, but the Chinese have made it a form of physical endurance, often pumping hands for several minutes. **SWING 'N' SWAY** Merging dance, theater, and circus, aerial acrobatic troupe Strange Fruit of Melbourne, Australia, performs complex routines atop flexible 16-foot-tall fiberglass poles.

ROTTEN LUCK Diners need to be as bold as Vikings to enjoy Icelandic *hákarl*, or rotten shark meat—traditionally prepared by burying the flesh of a Greenland shark for months to get rid of the toxic urea. Served in cubes on toothpicks, the odorous *hákarl* repels even some Icelanders.

HISTORICAL BAGGAGE The seemingly illogical airport code for Chicago's O'Hare International—ORD—is based on the plot of land for which it was built, Orchard Field. **WHO'S DRIVING** At 32.4 miles, Dubai's Metro Red Line ranks as the world's longest stretch of driverless metro rail. —Paul Martin



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to find an RV dealer,
watch videos, and more.



■ SMART TRAVELER



A fish boil ritual

LOCAL FLAVOR

Wisconsin's Fiery Favorite

IT'S FISH BOIL TIME ON DOOR PENINSULA By MARGARET LOFTUS

LIKE ITS COUSIN, the New England clambake, the fish boil of the upper Great Lakes grew out of a community coming together to celebrate local bounty. The custom of poaching the day's catch with potatoes was brought over by the region's Scandinavian settlers and no doubt sustained many a hearty soul on these rocky, wind-whipped shores.

More than a century later, the tradition lives on during the summer and early fall on Door Peninsula, the bluff-lined land that juts into Lake Michigan from Wisconsin's midsection.

At the **Old Post Office** in the village of Ephraim, master boiler Earl Jones has presided over the cast-iron cauldron for 14 summers, stoking the wood fire and perfectly timing each component—fresh whitefish steaks, red potatoes, sweet onions, and a fistful of salt—while regaling guests with Door lore and corny jokes. Until local restaurants revived the

tradition, "fish boils fed people in lumber camps, and churches used them as fundraisers," says owner Larry Krause. "Today, visitors can be a part of the tradition."

On Washington Island off the tip of the peninsula, fisherman Ken Koyen hosts weekly fish boils at his restaurant **K. K. Fiske**, which stands on the site of the dairy farm where he grew up. The highlight of the evening is the "overboil," when the master fuels the fire with kerosene and flames engulf the cauldron. Then comes the feast (below) accompanied by crunchy slaw, house-made bread, and local cherry pie for dessert.



ATLAS

Door County,
Wisconsin



With 300 miles of shoreline and 11 lighthouses, Door County is called the Cape Cod of the Midwest.

MIKE ROEMER (FIRE), JON JAROSH/DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU (FOOD); INTERNATIONAL MAPPING

A young boy is swinging on a tire swing that hangs from a large tree. He is wearing blue shorts and is barefoot. The background is a dense forest with large trees. In the distance, a large RV is parked on a grassy area. Other people are visible in the background, some sitting on the grass and others in the water. The sun is shining through the trees, creating a warm, golden light.

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CHECKING IN

Virginia's Pastoral Retreats



Horses graze in the pasture of the new Salamander Resort in Middleburg, Virginia.

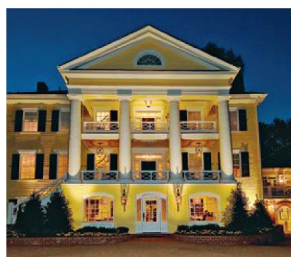
INN AT LITTLE WASHINGTON Framed by lush meadows with split-rail fences, chef Patrick O'Connell's posh, circa 1700s inn channels William Morris in its Mayor's House and newest annex, the Parsonage. Eating is the main sport, played either in the dining room or at one of the two chef's tables. Walk off your meals with a stroll through the inn's organic vegetable garden, or wander through the shops and art galleries of the Lilliputian town.

■ WASHINGTON, VA.; FROM \$460, INCLUDING BREAKFAST AND TEA



INN AT WILLOW GROVE Surrounded by rolling pastures speckled with Holstein cows, this former plantation features commanding vistas of the Blue Ridge mountains. Take in the scenery along a trail through the inn's 40 acres, or visit nearby Montpelier and tour James Madison's library. At the inn, enjoy a massage in the former smokehouse and a candlelit dinner in the dining room with exposed brick and fireplaces.

■ ORANGE, VA.; FROM \$275 INCLUDING LIGHT BREAKFAST, AND BEDTIME TEA AND SWEETS



SALAMANDER RESORT It's just a few minutes' walk from this bucolic resort to the town of Middleburg, the horse and hunt capital of Virginia's Piedmont region. Guests can sample the horsey life with riding lessons and trail rides; a yoga class includes poses on horseback. After the exertion, visit the spa for the Riders' Relief massage, or the wine bar for sips from local vineyards and a game of billiards. On warm evenings, opt for dinner on the terrace under the stars.

■ MIDDLEBURG, VA.; FROM \$325



TRENDING

SHOOT ONE TO SAVE THE REST?

By COSTAS CHRIST

In January, the Dallas Safari Club, a Texas-based hunting outfit, came up with an unconventional idea for protecting the critically endangered **AFRICAN BLACK RHINO**: Auction a permit to shoot one and donate the money for conservation. An international furor followed, pitting pro-trophy-hunting groups and wildlife conservation advocates against each other. One side pointed out that the targeted rhino was an old male well past reproductive age. The other side argued that killing endangered animals for sport—even to raise funds for conservation causes—sends a contradictory message. Namibia, the country that offered



Black rhino

the permit to shoot the rhino, is largely a conservation success story. But that has more to do with community-based ecotourism, a model that has shown that a living rhino can generate more income for conservation than one-off payments for dead ones. There are only about 4,880 black rhinos left in the world; these beasts are just steps away from extinction. What are enlightened travelers to do? My take: Hunting has its place, but not where the crosshairs are fixed on an endangered species. Pack a camera and track a rhino on foot with a local community guide. Not only is it an exhilarating wildlife experience, but the rhino gets to live.

JUSTIN KRIEL (PASTURE), GORDON BEALL (RESTAURANT), INN AT WILLOW GROVE (MANOR), BILL O'LEARY (THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES (BEDROOM), JOEL SARTORE/NGS CREATIVE (RHINO))

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Model sailboats ply the Conservatory Water.

FIRST PERSON ART IN THE BIG APPLE

Spending an art-filled day museum-hopping with my twin girls is even better than front-row seats at a Laurie Berkner concert—an equal thrill for the three of us with none of the jostling. We start at the **METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**, blowing by the main hall lines and instead taking the street-level entrance marked “School Groups”—that’s open to all. Beyond the ticket counter is an airy children’s library with game-loaded computers. One flight up and we’re staring at mummies and armor, which never fail to wow, as does the city view from the roof



TRAVELING WITH KIDS

Sailing Through Central Park

WHERE TO GO IN MANHATTAN’S PLAYGROUND By CHRIS BONANOS

PLACE	THE SCOOP	WANT TO DO
The Lake	Once a large swamp, now a picturesque 18-acre lake and stopover point for herons, egrets, and other migrating birds in spring and fall.	Rent a rowboat at the Loeb Boathouse (\$15 an hour), and head out for some pleasantly aimless rowing. Borrow binoculars at Belvedere Castle.
The Zoo	No, the zebras and lions of <i>Madagascar</i> don’t really live here. But there are 130 species ranging from red pandas to penguins. A pair of snow leopard cubs—the first ever to be born at the zoo—celebrates their one-year-old birthday in June.	Time your entrance or exit to the half hour, when the mechanical bronze animals rotate atop the musical Delacorte Clock just outside the zoo’s main gate. The 44 songs that play throughout the day change seasonally.
Shakespeare Garden	“Here’s flowers for you,” wrote Shakespeare in <i>The Winter’s Tale</i> , and in 1913, the commissioner of Central Park returned the sentiment, dedicating this traditional English garden to the bard.	Many of the plants mentioned in Shakespeare’s plays make an appearance here. Look for sweet marjoram to cowslip to roses (by any other name).

ATLAS

Central Park,
New York City



The architects, Carl Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, planted all but a few of the park’s trees. Even the hills and streams were built from scratch.

deck. After a stop for sandwiches and gelato at the nearby café Sant Ambroeus, we stroll to the **WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**, where the girls use paper and pencils to draw Alexander Calder’s sculptures before spotting whimsical artwork such as “Split-Rocker” by Jeff Koons (above). Don’t miss: the tiny wire acrobats in Calder’s miniature circus. From there, we grab red velvet doughnuts at Butterfield Market and take the subway to the **MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM**, housed in a complex of buildings including J. P. Morgan’s early 20th-century mansion. Past exhibitions have included the watercolor drawings from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s timeless tale, *The Little Prince*. The author wrote and illustrated the book in New York City—the perfect inspiration for young art lovers. —Rebecca Ascher-Walsh

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EXPLORER

Will Travel for Coffee

A BEAN BUYER HEADS FOR HIGHER GROUNDS By KATIE KNOROVSKY

IN THE “BEAN BELT” looping Africa, Asia, and the Americas, coffee provides more than a jolt—it’s an economic lifeline and a cultural bedrock. Kim Elena Ionescu stewards that link between bean and barista as a buyer and sustainability manager for North Carolina roaster Counter Culture Coffee, working one-on-one with growers and helping to set environmental standards for the coffee trade. Her hunt for the planet’s best beans has taken her from Bolivia to Ethiopia. Steeped in ritual, her adventures are anything but stale. She shares a few highlights here:

RED-EYE TRAVEL The best-tasting coffee comes from high elevations, which means transit to rural, mountainous areas. On one trip to Peru, I flew to Cusco and had a 14-hour drive ahead of me, through the night on dirt roads in a pickup in the Andes.

Another time, in Mexico, I arrived four hours tardy to a coffee co-op meeting. First my group left at least an hour late; then we stopped along the route to hunt for chinch bugs. And when we smelled a vat of *chicharrónes* [fried pork rinds] while passing through a town, the guy driving decided we had to stop for lunch.

Global coffee scout Kim Elena Ionescu in Durham, North Carolina

FULL-BODIED I pack light and always wear shoes with good tread, so I can hike at a moment’s notice. I’ll get plunked down by car on the first day, and then everything is on foot. That might mean five hours of hiking in the rain in Peru. I’ve learned to pack snacks and let go—to trust I’ll get where I’m going when I get there. I try to call on that inner peace in other frustrating situations, in travel or at home.

ROAST DATES Face-to-face is always the best way to create trust. Being a woman sometimes works to my advantage, especially with female growers. I don’t make promises I don’t keep. I always come back. And I don’t wear sunglasses. Smallholder producers never do, and it’s important to see people’s eyes.

SINGLE SOURCE I love food rituals. When I visited the Yirgacheffe cooperative in Ethiopia, a grower set up a coffee ceremony in his earthen house. His daughter roasted the coffee on a clay plate on a bed of coals, pushing around the beans quickly as they roasted. Burning frankincense filled the air. She heated water in a long-necked *jebena*. Once the coffee was roasted, she ground it with a mortar and pestle and added it to the hot water to boil together. Then she poured the coffee into little cups shaped like tulips, which keep the sludge at the bottom—there’s no filtration.

CAFFEINE HIGH Compared with the tropics, where you might see people selling fruits or newspapers at road crossings, in Ethiopia it’s women roasting, grinding, and selling little cups of coffee. Oftentimes, the coffee served in this ritual is heavily sweetened and not always delicious, but it’s still one of my favorite ways to drink coffee. The ceremony gives me goose bumps. Favorites aren’t always about quality but about the experience and the memory.

WORLD CALENDAR

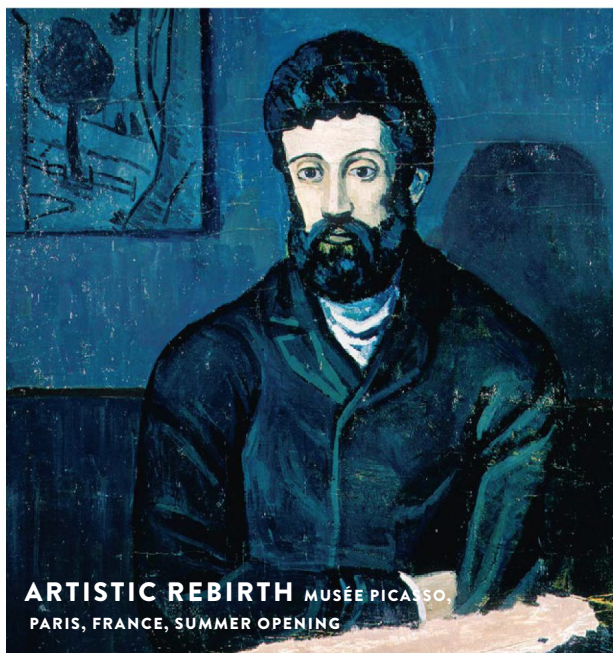
Summer's Bright Lights



THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

NATIONAL CENTER FOR CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS, ATLANTA, GEORGIA, MID-JUNE OPENING

Lessons from the past are connected to contemporary human rights movements through historic artifacts, such as handwritten notes and the briefcase (above) Martin Luther King, Jr., carried on the night he was assassinated, and interactive exhibits. Stand in front of the "Who Like Me Is Threatened?" mirror to learn how real people similar to you (in race, religion, and gender) are being oppressed today.



ARTISTIC REBIRTH MUSÉE PICASSO, PARIS, FRANCE, SUMMER OPENING

After a five-year closure, the home of the world's largest Pablo Picasso collection (*Portrait of a Man*, above) is expected to reopen this summer with a broader sampling of the museum's approximately 5,000 works.



STRIKE UP THE BAND

MONTREAL JAZZ FESTIVAL, CANADA, JUNE 26-JULY 6

The world's largest jazz fest fills six square blocks with the sounds of genre-bending music. With 3,000 performers, there's something for everyone, and this year's lineup includes Michael Bublé and the Chieftains. Don't miss: the Gershwin Legacy—commemorating the 90th anniversary of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

RUNNING IN THE STREETS

SAN FERMIN FESTIVAL, PAMPLONA, SPAIN, JULY 6-14

Unleashing your inner adrenaline junkie doesn't have to involve outrunning a half-ton bull. Some of the best (and safest) heart-pounding views of the daily 8 a.m. *encierro*, or bull run, are from balconies at the intersection of Mercaderes and Estafeta Streets, overlooking the aptly named "Dead Man's Corner."



CULTURES IN THE CAPITAL

SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL, WASHINGTON, D.C., JUNE 25-29, JULY 2-6

The world returns to the National Mall for the Smithsonian's international exposition of living cultural heritage. Kenya and China take this year's spotlight, and the learn-by-doing activities include making Chinese kites (above), running with Kenyan Olympians, and digging in a model Great Rift Valley archaeological site. Taste traditional dishes such as dumplings at the food tents.

MOREHOUSE COLLEGE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., COLLECTION (BRIEFCASE), RMN-GRAND PALAIS/ART RESOURCE NY (PORTRAIT), ANNIE CHEN (KITE), MKW3/SHUTTERSTOCK (TRUMPET), GARI GARAI/ALDE/BOSTOK/REDUX (BULLS)



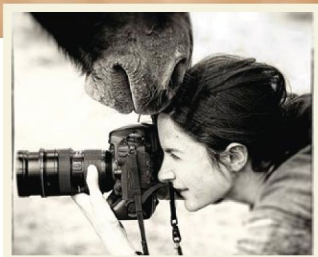
step out of bounds
MONTANA

#MontanaMoment | Bull moose in Fishercap Lake off the Swiftcurrent Trail in Glacier National Park

VISITMT.COM

"I was walking back from a day hike in the high country of Glacier National Park when I took a detour to look for wildlife along the hillside across this lake. As I scanned the hillside with my binoculars, I heard a huge splash in front of me. Startled, I dropped my binoculars to find a massive bull moose 50 feet away. The moose had been completely submerged when I first arrived at the lake." RONAN DONOVAN

Where the Locals Go MONTANA



The J Bar L Ranch, in Centennial Valley, Montana's Big Sky country

National Geographic photojournalist Ami Vitale's award-winning images have been exhibited and published worldwide. She's traveled to 85 countries on assignment, but calls Montana home.

One favorite place, Centennial Valley, lures her back again and again.

"When I took this picture, I felt an incredible rush of gratitude and love for this landscape. It's unspoiled, authentic. I think we're hardwired to respond to remote, pristine places, where you can stand on a mountain and see all the way across the horizon. The sky is big. It taps into something ancient and deeply moving, at the core of who we are. Maybe that's why so many travelers I meet cry when they leave. It's a haven for fly fishing, horseback riding, hiking, camping, working on a ranch—recharging. Montana is the only state that has the same number of species today that roamed here when Lewis and Clark explored it—bears, elk, moose, wolves. People here know it's special, feel connected, and have done a phenomenal job conserving and protecting it. I live in Missoula, and when I fly home and start to see the landscape, my whole body relaxes. It's a sense of peace I've never felt anywhere else. Montana has completely captured my heart."

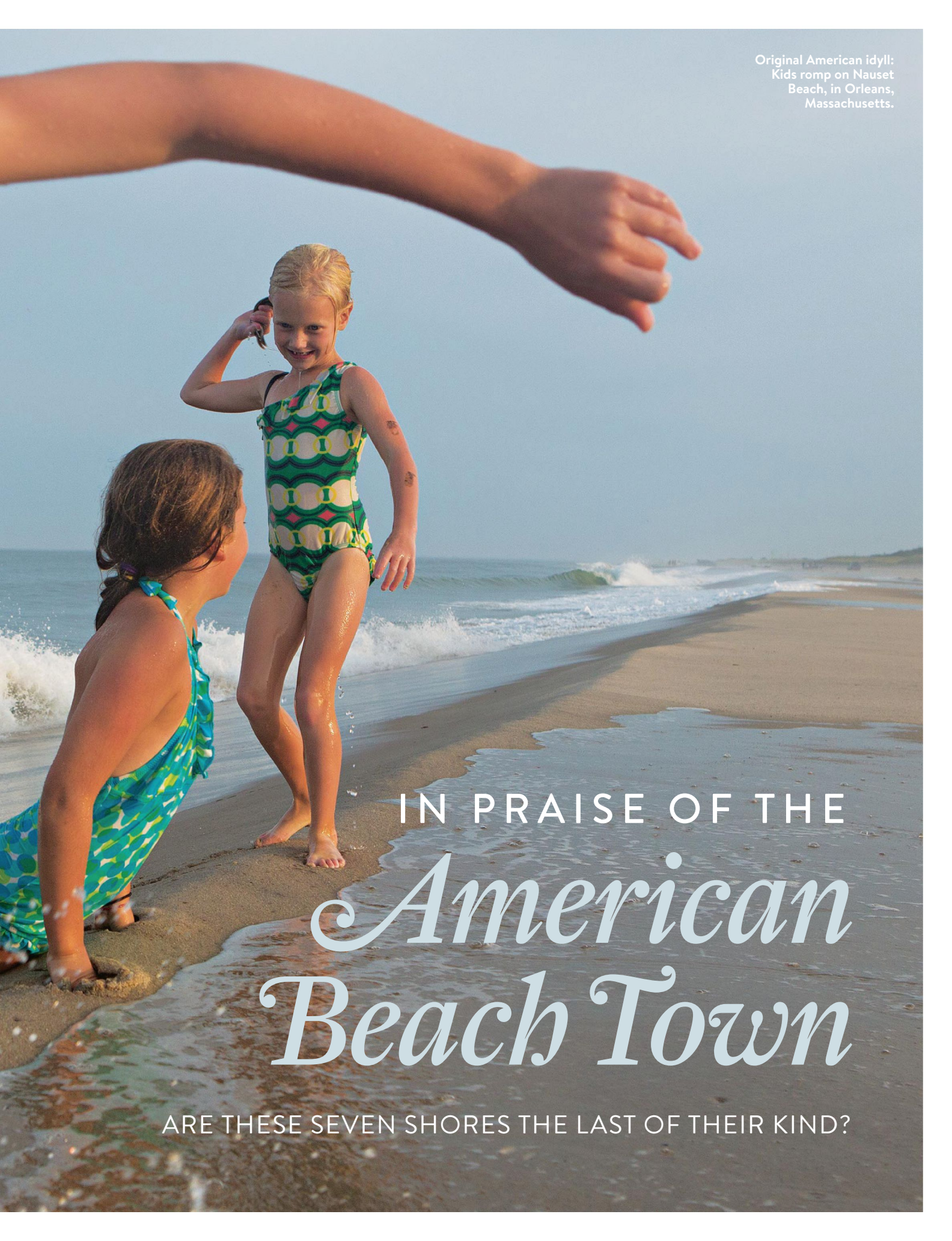
Ami Vitale

Check out *Where the Locals Go Montana*, a new online hub with insider advice from Montana locals and National Geographic experts, to help you plan your perfect vacation to Big Sky country.
nationalgeographic.com/local-montana

MONTANA
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Original American idyll:
Kids romp on Nauset
Beach, in Orleans,
Massachusetts.

IN PRAISE OF THE
*American
Beach Town*

ARE THESE SEVEN SHORES THE LAST OF THEIR KIND?

What makes a superior beach town?

I've thought about that often, usually while gorging on steamed clams with butter or pedaling a bike along a seawall. America does beaches extremely well, a point I didn't begin to realize until my 20s, when I tried to sunbathe on a jam-packed stretch of Spanish shore. But too many of the towns along our coastlines have become charmless and generic. They feel like shopping malls with sand. ¶ A great beach town must have shores that are spacious, picturesque, relatively uncrowded, and clean. Beyond that, its local culture not only has to service tourism but also transcend it. The town must have a prettiness about it that makes even a stroll to the grocery an occasion for

delight. Finally, it has to be timeless, meaning that though restaurants come and go and shops get sold, the contours and vistas around them remain recognizable through generations.

My favorites go further. Their allure springs from distinctiveness. On first visit, they already feel comfortable, even familiar, while having that ineffable sense of being unlike anywhere you've been before. Traveling around the country, I've rejoiced each time I have come across another of these American idylls. Weary of vacations that feel homogenized down to the margarita mix, I've resolved to celebrate as many as I can, lest the thousands of miles of U.S. coastline become one long, featureless stretch of big-box hotels and franchised stores, impossible to tell apart. As summer begins, I head east.

A CAPE COD FOR ALL SEASONS | ORLEANS, MASSACHUSETTS

My quest starts on Cape Cod, where some of my earliest beach memories originate. When I visited during the summer of 1969, the Citgo stations on the drive from Boston were handing out reproduction oil paintings of Red Sox players. I was only eight, but I remember hotels that were intimate, quirky, run by innkeepers. Dinner meant a boiled lobster or a bucket of steamers.

The paintings are long gone, along with the attendants who distributed them. It's a self-serve world now. But by the time I slip into bed beneath the 19th-century ceiling at the Ship's Knees Inn and get lulled to sleep by the throaty air conditioner, it's clear to me that the cape has hardly changed. Freckle-faced boys still dig sand castles on Nauset Beach. Lobster rolls, served warm with drawn butter or chilled with a dollop of mayonnaise, still taste like nothing else. Some of the saltbox houses, fronted by picket fences, may have changed hands a time or three since I first saw them. Still, as I drive down streets with plainspoken names like Meetinghouse, School, Bridge, and Monument, the connection with the past feels vibrant.

Orleans isn't the quaintest town on the cape, nor the largest or most renowned. It doesn't have Chatham's trinket shops or Truro's lighthouse, can't boast of an art community like

Provincetown's or oysters like Wellfleet's. Yet it remains my favorite. Set just above the crook of the arm of the peninsula, it's far enough out to discourage day-trippers but on the easy side of the long, traffic-clogged slog up Route 6 to the outer cape. It's a real place, not a stage set. It has full-size supermarkets, which encourages residents to remain when the summer ends. That means restaurants stay open. And if you need a lock repaired or your hair cut or a picket fence built, Orleans is where you'll get it.

The towns to the north stretch out along Route 6, the only artery through the outer cape. But Orleans has neighborhoods. Its streets meander to the water: Cape Cod Bay to the west, the Atlantic to the east. Cars heading north on Cranberry Highway turn left on Main Street to Skaket Beach, right to Nauset. It's four miles from one to the other. Local kids ride their bikes between in a matter of minutes. "Coast to coast," they call it, and it is—if Orleans is your continent.



The beaches couldn't be more different. Nauset is nearly perfect. It looks like a football field of sand, and then another, off into the distance. The sand itself is grainy, with enough heft for a preteen to produce world-class seashore architecture to last for generations, or at least until the waves roll in. Eiders alight, their heads white

and chests puffed out, then take flight again with a brief rustle. Nauset gets crowded, but it's a Saturday-afternoon-at-the-park kind of crowded, not Coney Island on Independence Day. There's always room for touch football. Weekdays are better than weekends, late August or June better than July.

And sometimes there is nobody at all. My first morning in town, I walk the five minutes down Beach Road from the Ship's Knees to the shore. It has rained the night before, and the fog hasn't lifted, so I don't see the water until I'm upon it. It's warm out, humid enough that the air has a palpable thickness. I head



Work and pray in Cape Cod: The congregation of the Federated Church of Orleans (above) has gathered since 1646; the church building dates from the late 1800s. Clam digging at Nauset Beach (below) yields a bucket of quahogs that might turn up later in a local chowder.





Liam's at Nauset Beach specializes in all manner of fried seafood, from scallops and shrimp to clams and cod, but the Orleans takeout is especially renowned for its onion rings. Liam's batters up and fries thousands of pounds of onions each summer.

along the ocean in a cone of mist, the waves purring rhythmically to my right, the sand in soft focus to my left. I pass the occasional couple and we nod conspiratorially, knowing how good this feels.

Another morning, up before dawn, I head to Skaket. First a stop at the Hole in One, with a pastry case up front, and where the breakfasts are as renowned as the lines are infamous. At Skaket, seagulls have gathered on a spit. Soon the small crescent of fine-grained sand will be filled with families, for the tide is so gentle on the bay side and the water deepens so gradually that anyone, even toddlers, can frolic. But for now, the beach is mine. I leave my sneakers near my car and walk to the bay, then wade in up to my knees while the gulls squawk around me, offering a symphony for a summer morning.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST NEVERLAND | MANZANITA, OREGON

In July, I fly to Portland and drive two hours to the Oregon coast, then turn south to Manzanita. By the time I pull up at Big Wave, a glorified diner at the top of town, it's 58 degrees under a cotton white sky. A brisk wind has the pines flailing. At the far end of Laneda Avenue, the broad stretch of immaculate sand is all but deserted. I'm wearing a fleece for the first time since May.

Then the razor clams arrive. They've been pulled from the Pacific, lightly breaded, grilled until golden. I take a bite, then sip the Eola Hills Pinot Gris that's sold by the glass, an ancillary

benefit of finding a beach destination that's barely an hour from a major wine region. By the time I'm digging into warm marionberry pie, my frustrations about the weather have dissipated into the salt air. It doesn't look like summer here, but it sure tastes like it.

A village of shingled houses and tall pines nestled between two state parks, Manzanita is as unspoiled as American beach



towns get. It's a mature, considered destination that attracts those who've been all over and prefer its restrained sensibility. You won't find billboards, carnival rides, packs of teenagers, lines at the ice-cream stand. "There are no hordes," says six-foot-ten Dennis Awtrey, who attracted enough attention while playing in the NBA.

Seeking tranquillity and a view of the water, Awtrey and his wife, Peggy, moved to Manzanita two years ago. Their stunningly modern house, designed by the same firm—Cutler Anderson Architects—that co-designed Bill Gates's in Seattle, doubles as a bed-and-breakfast. In a ponytail and purple slippers, Awtrey cooks crab quiche and other specialties for his guests every morning, two couples at most because two rooms is the Tillamook County limit for lodgings run in conjunction with a residence. It's that kind of place.



There's plenty of real estate for sand castles at seven-mile-long Neahkahnie Beach, in Manzanita, on the northern Oregon coast.



Manzanita break: A salty mural announces Big Wave Cafe, owned by chef Brian Williams. Fellow Oregonians Dennis and Peggy Awtrey (opposite) entertain guests at their hillside B&B.



In fact, the Oregon coast may be America's most understated stretch of tourist-friendly shoreline. "The road from Portland wasn't even completed until the early 1940s," says Tom Mock, a retiree who runs the local historical society. Summer days range from chilly to glorious, but almost never get hot enough to compel you to dive into the ocean.

That tends to weed out the party animals, the tour groups, the bucket listers. Nobody ever sang about Oregon Dreamin' or wished they all could be Oregon girls. But even in the context of the Oregon shore, Manzanita remains a hidden gem. To the south, the Tillamook Cheese Factory has an Epcot air. To the north, Cannon Beach is crammed with galleries, manicured inns, and No Parking signs.

Not Manzanita, which is speckled with small shops and restaurants that are actually frequented by locals, both the 600-odd permanent residents and a sizable population out of Portland, Seattle, and beyond that keeps second homes. You'll find them downing beers at the San Dune, buying organic produce at the farmers market in the center of town, and consulting tide tables at Manzanita News & Espresso.

Walking down Laneda, I revel in the absence of familiar brands. There's a sandwich shop called Bread and Ocean. Salt and Paper sells stationery—and taffy. I wander into the Cloud and Leaf, the "last remaining bookstore in the county," according to owner Jody Swanson, and a gathering place for readings, intelligent conversation, and musical acts.

At the end of the street I reach the shore. The tide is low, and the dun-colored sand seems to stretch for half a mile before it reaches the ocean. Nearly everyone I see—young or older, man or woman—wears the same uniform: a cap, a sweatshirt, shorts. A dog at the end of a leash is optional. Manzanita in high season, it occurs to me, looks like Cape Cod in October. I step onto the beach feeling unfettered, channeling the town's ambient spirit. Without a moment's thought, I break into a run.

GULF COAST GOLD | BOCA GRANDE, FLORIDA

By the time I get to Gasparilla Island, a glorified sandbar off Florida's west coast that's about an hour's drive from Fort Myers or Sarasota and a whole lot harder to reach from everywhere else, Labor Day has come and gone. I'm seeking the warmth of the sun, and a genuine Florida beach town that will serve as an antidote to the forests of condos and hotels that line the coasts north of Miami and south of Tampa.

I find three generations of Joiner women relaxing in mismatched chairs at the far end of their marina, which has been trading in gasoline, tackle, snacks, sundries, and gossip since 1926. Isabelle Joiner, daughter of the founder, tells me she has been sitting in pretty much the same place, gazing out at the same inlet, for seven decades, going on eight.

There's a heron perched on a log and sunlight filtering through the tall grass past a gas pump near the water's edge. It might be 1950 or 1990, who could tell? "Oh, there've been changes," Joiner replies. "We used to shuck and sell oysters from right in there," she says, nodding toward the shack

abutting the dock. "Can't now. They need to be inspected."

I've already figured out that it's more fun to hang with the locals, an insular community of some 500 square-knot tiers, rum slingers, odd-jobbers, and historic preservationists, than the "beachfronters," those part-timers who swell the head count tenfold at the height of the winter season in a blaze of preppy plaid. But what makes Gasparilla special is that it takes both demographics to give the place its personality. Their interactions on the compact streets of the island create narratives that are part John Cheever and part Sherwood Anderson, accompanied by the lilt and thrum of a Jimmy Buffett song.

Katharine Hepburn, who owned property in the island's only town, Boca Grande, was a beachfronter. So are the Bushes, Pappy on down, who arrive in force every Christmas and occupy a dozen or so rooms at the Gasparilla Inn, the lemonade-colored clapboard hotel at 5th and Palm that holds an outsize presence in the community.

While the Joiners wear fishing-derby T-shirts and faded shorts, beachfronters are resplendent in full Palm Beach regalia: lots of pink and green, and Vineyard Vines ties for dinner at the inn. If they putter around town in golf carts or on bicycles as if they know just where they're headed, it's because they do. That's the thing about Gasparilla: Those who've been coming down for weeks at a time all their lives have the same proprietary feeling as those who never leave. The Joiners' vistas haven't changed in generations, but the Bushes' haven't, either. Merely renovating the inn's dining room was a perilous undertaking. "Fortunately, most of our longtime customers understood it had to be done," says the former hotel general manager, Jack Damioli, putting an emphasis on the "most."

A 1980 ordinance called the Gasparilla Act restricted building heights, limited density, and banned billboards and neon. I can't find anyone willing to argue against any of that. Just in case, the Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association has created a photoshopped view of what the island might look like if the legislation didn't exist, including a wall of condos rising from the shoreline. It circulates periodically as a frightful reminder.

At the inn I meet Cannon Jones, who works the front desk. Her dad, Yogi, bought property here in 1986, when she was a toddler. The family migrated down from Connecticut each winter holiday that followed. Cannon stayed north for college, but when Yogi died three years ago, she needed somewhere secure that felt like home. She knew exactly where that was.

Cannon was married beneath the boughs on Banyan Street, which had been barricaded for the occasion. Her groom, Nick Wenzel, is a local who has been "on island," as they say, since puberty—fishing, guiding, loitering, part of the fabric of the place. I can't help seeing Cannon and Nick as one of those royal marriages that unite two disparate domains.

One evening, just as the old-fashioned streetlights start to blink on, I pedal my rented bike to The Temp to meet them for a drink. The restaurant is formally named The Temptation, but

Continued on page 86



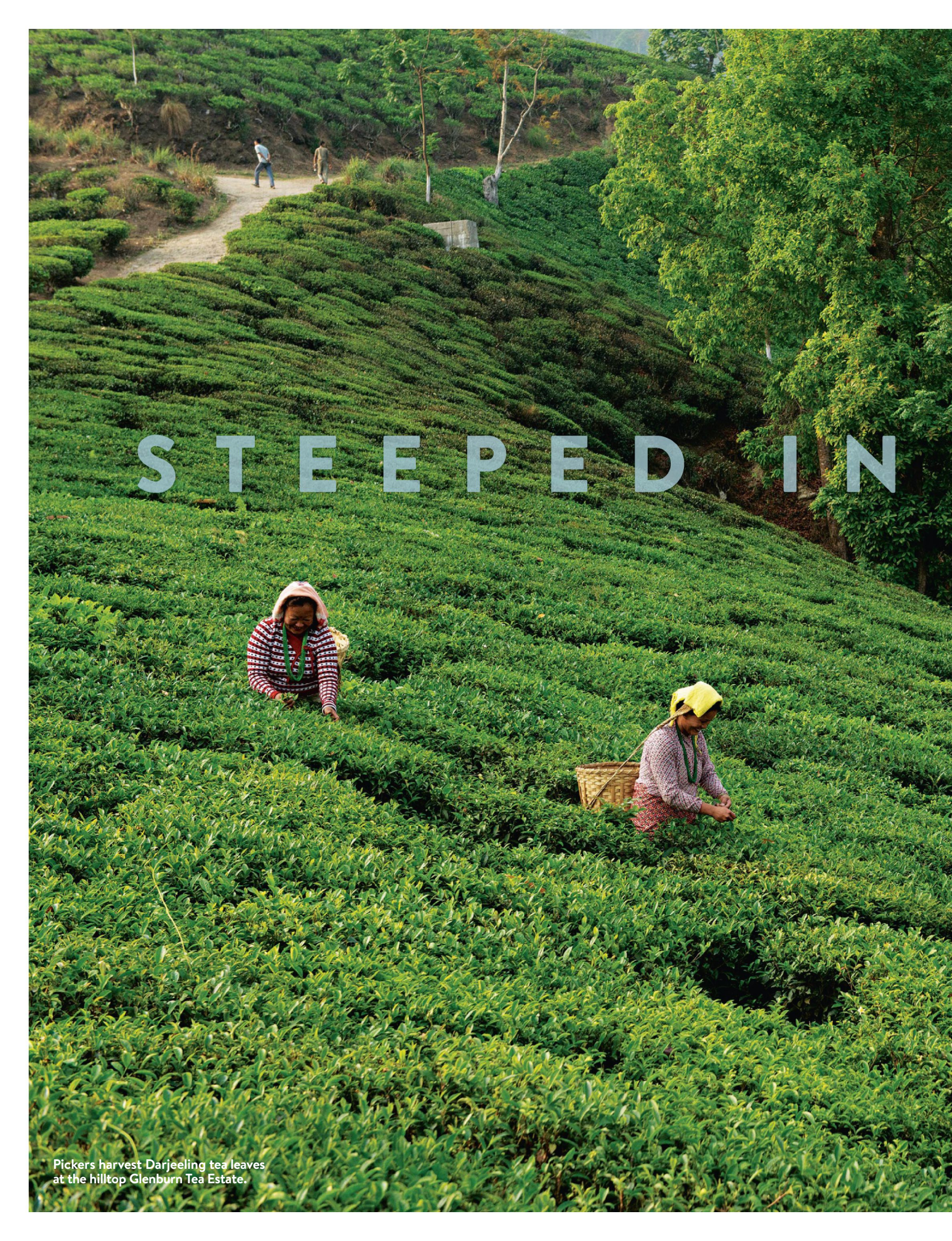
ON THE
IPAD

See more images of these classic beach towns, including photos by frequent *National Geographic* contributor Amy Toensing.



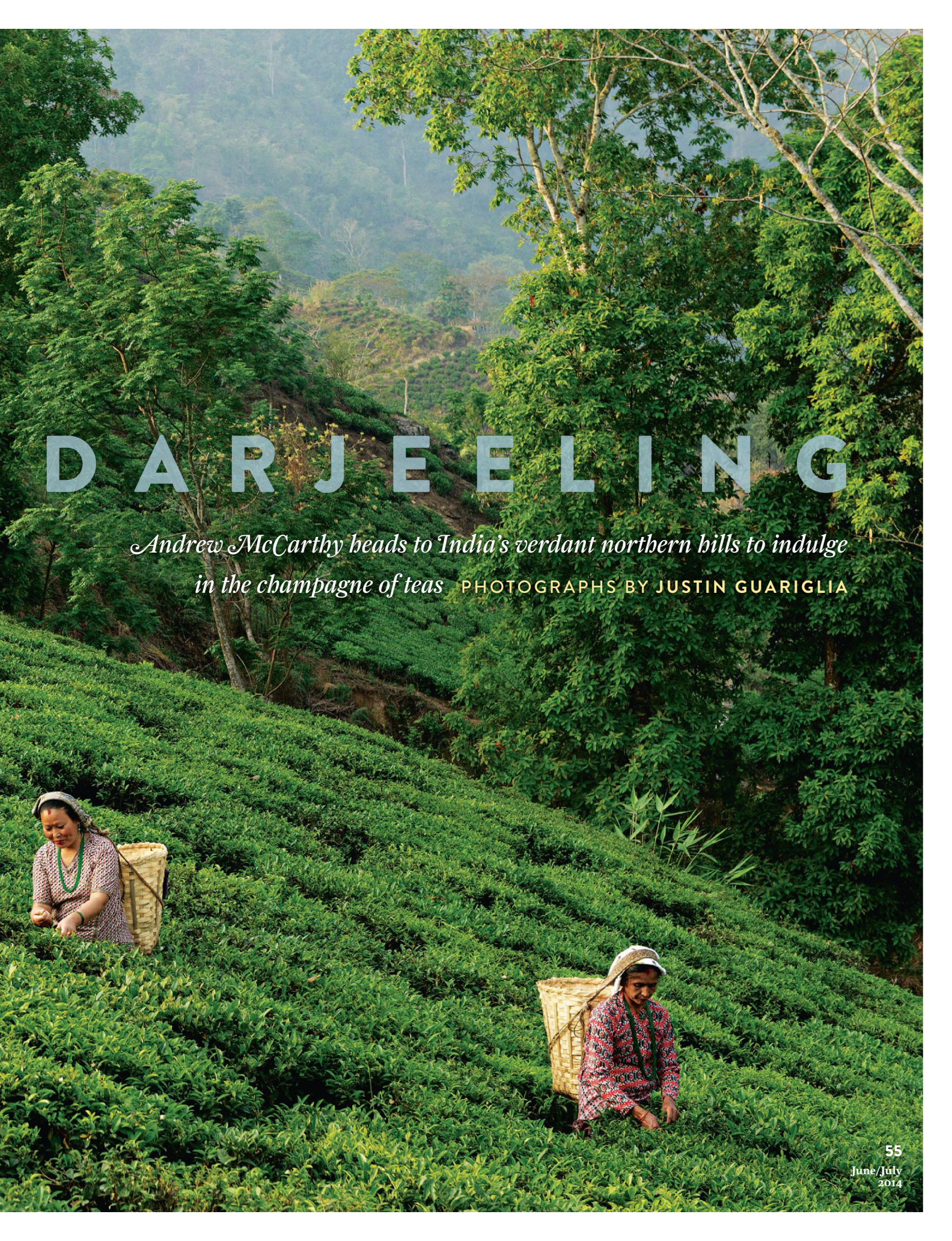
Keys to Florida: Asian tuna tartare in a jar (above left) starts off a meal at the Pink Elephant in Boca Grande. Egrets (above right) pay a visit to the Gasparilla Inn's 18-hole, Pete Dye golf course. Surfers (below) wait for the perfect wave at Gasparilla Island State Park.





STEEPED IN

Pickers harvest Darjeeling tea leaves
at the hilltop Glenburn Tea Estate.



DARJEELING

*Andrew McCarthy heads to India's verdant northern hills to indulge
in the champagne of teas* PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUSTIN GUARIGLIA

SITTING ON A SPLINTER-PLAGUED BENCH outside a cement-and-mud hut under a magnolia tree, I watch a young woman with a sad, unguarded smile bend to offer me a yellowing porcelain cup without a handle. A confused rooster is crowing at the late afternoon sun slashing light across

manicured tea trees that cling to the hillside rolling down to the Rung Dung River. In the distance, the hills rise back up, capped by a jumble of buildings in varying states of decay. Darjeeling.

I raise the dirty cup to my lips. The woody aroma of tea pushes away the flowered scent of the air. The amber liquid slides into my mouth. Could this really be it?

High in the foothills of the Himalaya, at the northern tip of the Indian state of West Bengal, between Bhutan and Nepal, I am searching for the best cup of tea in the world. It started innocently enough. One morning at home in New York, I sleepily looked at the contents of the cup in my hand and wondered, “Where does this come from?”

Tea today is a \$40 billion industry, making it, after water, the most popular drink on the planet. But there is only one place that produces what has come to be known as “the champagne of teas,” a distinctive light brew with a telltale Muscatel flavor: these slopes in eastern India. So here I am in Darjeeling.

The British arrived in this part of the Lesser Himalaya, ruled by the Gurkha of Nepal, in the 19th century and set up a military

outpost. The area around Darjeeling quickly grew into a summer retreat for colonists who wanted to escape the heat of the plains. The climate proved ideal for cultivating tea, and an industry was born. A narrow-gauge railway (accorded World Heritage status in 1999) sliced through the mountains by 1881, connecting the village to the wider world,

and Darjeeling grew. Political unrest came and went and has returned, with many locals striving to establish an independent state of Gurkhaland. Today Darjeeling maintains a precarious hold on itself. Its buildings balance atop plunging hills that give way to deep valleys or cling to precipices with nearly vertical drops. Narrow twisting lanes, far too small for the cars that now drive them, carve into the hills. Darjeeling feels like a battered, overtaxed Oz. Yet there’s a hardscrabble charm to the chaotic development, which spreads out from Chowrasta, the town’s square.

“Darjeeling was designed by the British for 50,000 people,” Darjeeling native Sailesh Sarda tells me over a pot of green pearl tea in Nathmulls Tea Room. “We have 250,000 residents now. This has become a concrete jungle. But it’s very cosmopolitan; people are happy. I would not give up this town for anything.” Sarda’s great-grandfather opened Nathmulls in 1931, and it’s been the family business since. “You go to someone’s home, the first thing offered is a cup of tea,” he says. “Conversation, connection, happens with a cup of tea.”

Faces of Darjeeling: Tea plantation workers reflect the region’s mix of ethnicities, from Nepali to Bengali to Tibetan.





Tibetan monks
clean butter
lamps at Yiga
Choling Gompa
Monastery.



Buddhist prayer flags festoon
a Darjeeling neighborhood.



To get an idea just how in demand Darjeeling's prime export is, the region produces roughly 9,000 tons of tea a year, yet thousands of tons worldwide are stamped with the label "Darjeeling." A consortium has been created to protect the brand by establishing strict guidelines and growing areas where the tea must be produced if it's to carry the pedigreed label.

While Darjeeling's streets are crowded and much appears to be in some stage of decline, this is not the sweltering, swarming, jumbled India. It's a high-country outpost with cool air that feels as if it has more in common, geographically and culturally, with nearby Nepal and Bhutan than with Delhi or Kolkata. Tibetan dress shops selling traditional *goecheh chupa* sit beside Indian shops selling saris. Nepali is the lingua franca. Sipping a mango lassi and eating *momo* dumplings in a small eatery, a picture of the Dalai Lama hanging above the Tibetan man at the counter, I could be in Kathmandu. Yet Darjeeling is very much itself.

Each morning I pay a few rupees to a grinning woman named Jojo, who heats water over an open fire in a corner of Chowrasta, then hands me a plastic cup filled up with a murky brew that could melt steel. I return each day to sit on a wood crate and watch dogs that slept where they dropped rouse themselves as Darjeeling awakes. Nearby, stalls selling produce shake themselves into order. A rope-thin man sells cigarettes, one at a time. The whacking of a butcher's cleaver onto an ironwood stump, dicing up just throttled chickens, has stout women forming a line. Monks in Buddhist saffron-colored robes sit five to a bench and whisper. The aroma of wood fires, tainted with the smell of horse manure and frying noodles, scars the crisp air.

Down in the lower part of town, off traffic-choked Hill Cart Road, Chowk Bazaar is throbbing at all hours. Coriander and turmeric, mustard and aniseed, wait in massive barrels. Muslim men hack apart carcasses of meat. Nearby, Bombay ducks hang.

"If this market is closed, Darjeeling is closed," Ratan Lepcha, a small man with a big mustache, tells me from the stall where his family has sold tea for 80 years. "You must try the autumn flush; it is a strong tea, a complete tea, my favorite." Everyone in Darjeeling, it seems, has a favorite. And with four major harvests per year, each producing very different grades of leaves

that can be transformed during processing into black, white, green, or oolong teas, Darjeeling is a connoisseur's mecca.

ONE AFTERNOON, not far from the monkeys that scamper around Mahakal Temple, on Observatory Hill, I find myself back in the glory days of the British raj, at the Windamere Hotel. Built as a boarding house for British planters in the 1880s, the Windamere is proudly stuck in time. In a cheerily dingy parlor, two women in lace aprons serve afternoon tea. Framed letters by long-forgotten dignitaries, fading photos of glassy-eyed Brits in silly hats sipping drinks on New Year's Eve, and stained pictures of monks shaking hands with decorated military officers cover the walls. "We have restored, not

renovated," executive director Elizabeth Clarke assures me over a cup of first flush, the light and floral tea made from the first harvest of the season in March.

Down a hill on Nehru Road sits the Planters Club, once a meeting place for those in the trade. It's a relic that maintains no pretensions of relevance. Musty carpets stretch beneath stuffed animal heads lining the walls of a billiard room that is empty save for an old man asleep on a sofa, wearing what looks like a leopard-skin pillbox hat—a specter of glory days long gone.

Little else about Darjeeling is so saddled by sentiment, and the tea trade is bigger business than ever. While town affords a nearly endless opportunity to sample every variety of the local brew, to get a true feel for Darjeeling tea you need to head to the hills, to the tea estates.

All of the 87 licensed tea estates here are a variation on a theme: rolling hills covered with millions of low, neatly kept tea trees. Women wearing head scarves or wide-brimmed hats stalk the fields, hand-plucking two leaves and a bud, then tossing them over their shoulders into the wicker baskets on their backs. Each will pick thousands of leaves during a 12-hour shift, day after day. The on-site processing centers are filled with long trays, rolling machines, and packaging sectors. Tea estates are micro-universes, with their own caste systems. They support hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people under the supervision of estate managers, such as Rajah Banerjee. A lion of a man with a mane of silver hair and dressed in a vaguely military uniform that implies a nod to the plantation days of British imperialism, Banerjee presides over the Makaibari Tea Estates. Born on Makaibari, Banerjee is one of the few owners who run their estates hands-on. But to hear him tell the story—and Banerjee is nothing if not a



ON THE IPAD

View more of photographer Justin Guariglia's images of the hill town of Darjeeling and tea plantations that surround it.



Town of tea shops, temples, and colonial buildings, Darjeeling (above) perches in foothills of the Himalaya. Visitors pose by a vintage steam engine (below) that powers Darjeeling's "Toy Train," part of a World Heritage site. A young apprentice (opposite) sews in a tailor shop.





A tea seller fortifies herself with a sip of her own brew.

storyteller—he never intended for things to turn out that way.

During a visit home while at university in London, he was thrown from his horse, landed in a tea tree, and got back up with a white-light realization that his destiny lay amid the tea trees on the 550-acre estate. More than 40 years later, his passion for Makaibari and its teas is undiminished.

“Not all tea estates are equal; quality and quantity are not synonymous,” Banerjee pronounces. “Darjeeling tea is craft, not industry. The personality of each estate is reflected in the cup. You can taste it.” Banerjee was the first tea grower in Darjeeling to take his product organic. Part P. T. Barnum, part farmer, part aesthete, Banerjee is a Shakespeare-quoting enthusiast equally ardent when discussing life’s karmic balance sheet, Rudolf Steiner’s theories about the astral body, and the perfect soil pH for growing tea (4.5-5.5). He rambles at length about the spirit of Makaibari, the tranquillity and opportunity for reflection his tea offers, and his desire to bring it to the wider world, thus walking into a new era of peace for humanity.

It is a lot to ask of a cup of tea, but Banerjee’s charisma is undeniable, his passion infectious. Sitting in his office, sipping a subtle white tea under his forceful gaze, I find many of his grandiose notions not only plausible but inevitable. Once again, the lubrication of a smooth cup of Darjeeling leads to a surprising conversation and connection.

TO THE NORTHEAST of Makaibari, beneath magnolia and palmetto trees at the end of a blistered lane, the Glenburn Tea Estate offers what may be the softest landing in the Darjeeling hills. The airy guesthouse of eight casually elegant rooms set on a 1,600-acre working tea plantation has me lingering longer than expected. Glenburn is managed by an Indian “Indiana Jones” named Sanjay Sharma. “What keeps us going is the pursuit of the ever elusive perfect cup of tea. All of these tea trees, all the people working in the field, in the processing center—at the end of the day, it’s all about what ends up in the cup.”

What has ended up in my cup early one morning as I sit in my four-poster bed propped by overstuffed pillows is a strong second flush—made from the season’s second, June, harvest—plucked from some of the trees surrounding my bedroom. The infusion has a rich amber color, a woodsy strength, and a long finish. The shutters are flung open. The night is yielding its hold. The sky has been hazy for my entire stay; I haven’t had a single glimpse of the sacred peak Kanchenjunga and the Himalaya. But as the dark begins to scatter, the ridgeline of the famous mountain range asserts itself. I slip from my bed, cup in hand, and walk to the window. As the light gathers confidence, Kanchenjunga rises above the rest. I watch the glistening white of the world’s highest mountain range come into focus.

I take another long pull from my cup. The brew has just the right combination of astringency and smoothness. It’s difficult to imagine a more satisfying cup of tea than this.

Later in the day, bouncing along yet another heavily rutted single-lane track, my spine has had enough. At the crest of a rise, across from a vast tabletop of tea trees, relief presents

itself. A simple wooden bench sits beside the road before a small cement-and-wood hut in the shade of blooming magnolia trees. It’s a primitive store operated by 26-year-old Bimala. She’s of Rai heritage, her people originally hailing from Nepal. I watch as she prepares me a plate of momos and brews me a cup of tea without prompting. The blush of youth still dominates her soft, open face, yet there’s a weary air about her. Work is scarce in the valley; with her modest shop she supports her parents, two brothers and their wives, and five nieces and nephews. They all share the small home just a few steps from her roadside stand. Her day, she tells me, starts at 4 a.m. She prepares simple meals and sells vegetables—potatoes, peppers, radishes, cucumbers; cauliflower is growing in the garden—though her best seller is a home-brewed rice wine. The business is a testament to perseverance, yet Bimala is thinking of giving up.

“The people around here get paid once a month,” she tells

“Darjeeling tea IS CRAFT, NOT INDUSTRY,” SAYS RAJAH BANERJEE. “THE PERSONALITY OF EACH ESTATE IS REFLECTED IN THE CUP. YOU CAN TASTE IT.”

me, “so they buy from me on credit. Then they don’t pay.”

She invites me into her home. I scan the small, well-kept rooms, the hard-mat beds. We look at a faded photo of her grandparents. Beneath the house is an enclosure with two bony cows. The nearby pigpen is empty. “The pig died.” A hen sits in a basket, chicks scamper underfoot.

We walk back to her shop. As Bimala prepares more tea, she tells me an oft-told tale. It seems there was a boy, and a marriage proposal—but her mother is losing her sight, her father is ill. What would they do without her?

She refills my cup.

I’ve had finer tea, richer, more nuanced tea. But Bimala’s openhearted hospitality takes away any bitterness my chipped porcelain cup may contain. I’m reminded of something I heard early on in Darjeeling: “Tea is the people’s drink.”

Bimala’s father calls to her from the house; she silently withdraws. I sit and watch the clouds cascade down from the hills above. In time, Bimala returns, as silent as she left. She smiles her sad smile. Finally, she pours herself a cup of tea. She sits on the bench with me, and, side by side, looking out, we sip our tea in silence. The clouds dip lower, reaching the tops of tea trees across the road. Fog settles around us. I empty my chipped cup, Bimala refills it. As I raise it again, she raises her own. Our rims of porcelain touch—and she smiles again. This time the sadness is gone from her face; she is simply a beautiful young woman enjoying a simple pleasure.

The fog lifts as suddenly as it had descended, the sun pours down, the ground steams. Now I’m grinning too, sipping what is, without question, the single best cup of tea I’ve ever tasted.

Editor at Large **ANDREW MCCARTHY** developed an addiction to Darjeeling first flush during his stay. Photographer **JUSTIN GUARIGLIA**’s latest book is *Johor: Asia Latitude One* (2011).

Darjeeling, India

TEA REIGNS in Darjeeling, where life is marked by the four harvest seasons: first flush in spring, the second flush in June, monsoon season (yes, it's a tea season) July-August, and the autumn flush from October into November.

WHERE TO STAY

The local icon is the **Windamere Hotel**, a cluster of country-cozy cottages from British raj times, with vintage furnishings and historical artifacts (guests have included the king of Sweden and Everest conqueror Sir Edmund Hillary). Its hillside location makes for wide views of the high Himalaya. Visitors also can—and should—stay at one of the tea estates, most of which offer tours and visits to their tea-processing facilities. On the high end is the elegant yet casual hilltop **Glenburn Tea Estate**, where guest rooms are surrounded by hundreds of acres of tea plantings and trees. Also notable: the

Goomtee Tea Resort, with a four-room main house that makes you feel as if you're staying at your own private tea estate; the bio-organic **Tumsong Tea Estate & Retreat**, which has four suites; and the **Selim Hill Tea Estate & Retreat**, known for its sweeping mountain vistas. Visitors eager for an immersion in local life may enjoy a homestay with one of the working families at the **Makaibari Tea Estates**; a night for two people, including all meals—and tea—runs about \$25.

WHERE TO EAT

Food in Darjeeling is as influenced by nearby Nepal and Bhutan as by India. I had the best *momo* dumplings at



Kunga Restaurant, on Gandhi Road. Fans of breakfasts—French toast, hash browns—swear by tiny **Sonam's Kitchen**, on Dr. Zakir Hussain Road. And north Indian curries star alongside Thai and Chinese dishes at **The Park** restaurant, on Laden La Road. Many tea plantations also offer dining.

SHOPPING FOR TEA

Darjeeling supports a number of tea shops, some of which ship

purchases. **Nathmulls** showcases more than 50 teas and is popular for its tastings. Nearby **Tea Emporium**, in business since 1940, offers tastings and blogs about its tea offerings. **Golden Tips Tea** stocks hundreds of loose-leaf teas for tasting and purchase (though its prices are on the higher end).

BEYOND TEA

Chowk Bazaar is where locals go to buy produce and other

goods. For stores that specialize in crafts and clothing, head to **Nehru Road** and **Chowrasta** square. You'll find traditional copper pots, Tibetan carpets, prayer wheels, and other crafts made by hand at the **Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre**, which supports community services for refugees from nearby Tibet.

One of the best ways to take in the mountain scenery is on a "joy ride" aboard the historic **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway**, known as the Toy Train and part of the Mountain Railways of India World Heritage site. The Sukna Steam Special joy ride travels through tea estates.

ATLAS



All teas derive from the same plant, *Camellia sinensis*, and are related to the ornamental camellia flower.

Boiled tea water effectively cleans and polishes most hardwood floors, thanks to the tannins found in tea.

British actress Vivian Leigh, who won an Oscar for her role as southern belle Scarlett O'Hara in the 1939 film *Gone With the Wind*, was born in Darjeeling.



Tea samples at Makaibari Estates

TEA NOTES

A CONNOISSEUR'S TAKE

British author George Orwell (1904), born in a town west of Darjeeling, was a lifelong tea drinker. Among his observations about the Indian brew: "Anyone who has used that comforting phrase 'a nice cup of tea' invariably means Indian tea...All true tea lovers not only like their tea strong, but like it a little stronger with each year that passes...Lastly, tea—unless one is drinking it in the Russian style—should be drunk without sugar...How can you call yourself a true tea-lover if you destroy the flavour of your tea by putting sugar in it?" (Excerpted from Orwell's 1946 essay "A Nice Cup of Tea")



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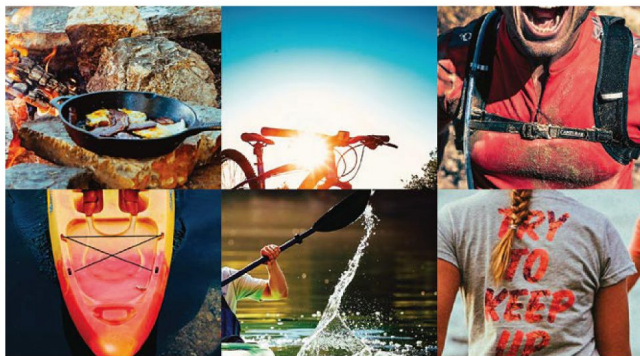
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Aboard the *Tuffa* (opposite), Hanna Thorén Karlsson teaches lesson one of Sweden's Bohuslän Coast: how to shuck an oyster. Extra credit: Wash it down with a local porter.

FORGET NORDIC
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COAST IT'S ALL ABOUT
SOAKING UP THOSE
BLUE SWEDE VIEWS



SWEDEN BY THE SEA

BY STEPHANIE PEARSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTIAN ÅSLUND

“OYSTERS ALWAYS TASTE BEST

when you open them yourself,” says Hanna Thorén Karlsson, as she throws a thick blond braid over her shoulder and grabs a bivalve from a bed of seaweed. With a move that would bloody a lesser shucker, she slices the oyster in half. “The first rule of shucking oysters,” she adds, “is that you need a good glove.”

“Why are oysters aphrodisiacs?” asks the only other guest on this oyster cruise, a foodie I’ve just met from Aspen, Colorado.

“I always eat them, so I don’t know,” Karlsson says, laughing, offering her the opened shell and dodging the question with a bit of Swedish restraint. “But it’s important to really chew it and feel the mineral taste.”

I’m on the Bohuslän Coast, puttering between smooth gray granite islands topped by red cottages. This 112-mile stretch from Gothenburg to the Norwegian border on Sweden’s west coast—or the “best coast,” as some call this playland of villages and 8,000 islands and islets—has always been a summertime magnet for locals. But in recent years international travelers like me have been drawn to Grebbestad’s clean, cold salt water that produces 90 percent of the country’s oysters, 70 percent of its sea crayfish, and almost half of its lobsters.

Karlsson is merely the latest Swede I’ve met with a visceral connection to the sea—an unbroken link forged by the Vikings. It’s a far cry from the prim, Garrison Keillor–style Scandinavia I imagined as a child in Duluth, Minnesota, a few hours from my

great-grandparents’ homestead. In 1883, they emigrated from Tvååker, south of Gothenburg, to the lumber-and-mining boomtown of Tower, Minnesota. Grandma Flossie would drag me to the Lutheran church basement for Swedish Cultural Society meetings, a gathering of white-haired ladies drinking coffee and eating lutefisk (dried cod soaked in lye). On Santa Lucia Day, the Festival of Light, they anointed my blond head with a crown of flaming candles. Luckily, my hair never caught fire.

That naive vision changed the summer I turned 15, when my teenage Swedish cousin visited—and shed her bikini top at our crowded Minnesota beach. If she was an accurate representation, my mother country was a land of free spirits who knew how to be one with the outdoors. Here, many years later on the coast of Sweden, that perception seems to match reality.

I’m fortunate to have hired Karlsson as my oyster guide—as well as her father, Per, a former oyster-opening champion of Grebbestad’s annual competition. (He shucked 20 oysters in three minutes, five seconds.) The Karlssons have brought me out on the *Tuffa*, their restored 1952 wooden cruiser that was built by the famed Swedish boatbuilder Gösta Johansson.

Karlsson passes me the knife, and I butcher a pale green mollusk. The meat inside is raw, like Swedish sushi. We return to the Karlssons’ boathouse, and they invite us upstairs to an airy dining room overlooking the bay. “Are you ready for more seafood?” Hanna asks, placing a heaping platter on a pine table. Per pours Slovenian Sauvignon Blanc, and we raise our glasses to the languorous summer days ahead.





Islands, islets, and rock outcroppings dot Sweden's west coast, including the wildlife-rich Koster Islands and Smögen, where bright fishing huts (opposite) in the harbor look like a box of crayons.



In coastal Sweden, life revolves around the harbor, ebbing and flowing with the day's haul. The waters around villages such as Kungshamn (above) and Lysekil (below) supply most of Sweden's seafood, especially oysters and lobsters.



MY JOURNEY HAD BEGUN in Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city, where I rented a Volvo and took the E6 highway north. Tempted as I was to explore the harbor and the city's 17th-century center, the highway proved to be a Scandinavian autobahn. Within minutes I'd passed the suburban Ikea and found myself in the countryside, where immaculate red farmhouses contrast with the deep green pastures, and just as quickly are replaced by cliffs and pine forests. I had allowed two nights to drive 100 miles to Strömstad, 12 miles shy of the Norwegian border, where a ferry could take me to South Koster Island and the Kosterhavet, Sweden's first national marine park.

But first, I keep giving in to detours. Even before the oyster cruise, I couldn't resist the draw of salt water.

"Sea kayaking used to be old men with big beards watching birds," I am told by Torbjörn Söderholm, the thirtysomething co-founder of Nautopp Seakayaking, an admittedly rare pursuit on the west coast. After all, we're only 600 miles south of the Arctic Circle. "But there's no better way than a sea kayak to explore this coastline."

I meet Söderholm at Strandflickorna Hotel, a restored inn, after sleeping in an attic suite and eating fresh bread slathered with lingonberry jam for breakfast. Built in 1904, the hotel used to be a retreat for exhausted Stockholm nurses. It's in Lysekil, a village on the tip of a peninsula between the ten-mile-long Gullmar Fjord and a sheltered bay of the Skagerrak Sea.

Söderholm and I drive to a campground on the bay with his Danish wife, Kathrine Olufsen, and start paddling toward Stora Kornö, an island several miles northwest of Lysekil. This area has been inhabited for hundreds of years, but we may as well be miles from civilization, paddling past islands of naked pink granite that slope into water that's, surprisingly, almost as warm as the Mediterranean. A half dozen seals swim between our kayaks, rising lethargically out of the water as if waking from a winter's sleep.

Söderholm tells me about the fishing culture that thrived and died along this coast following the unpredictable herring runs. The largest, between 1780 and 1808, was so massive that herring oil is said to have powered the street lamps in Paris and London. The last giant run dried up around 1900 and is one of the reasons some Swedes, like my great-grandparents, became desperate for a new start in America. Herring, pickled in acetic acid, water, sugar, allspice, red onion, carrot, and salt, remains at the center of every Swedish smorgasbord.

We paddle rolling waves for a few hours and discuss *jantelagen*—a foreign concept to Americans, perhaps the reason there's no direct translation to English.

"It means never wanting to think you're something special," says Söderholm. "We Swedes make fun of it, but we're really like that. You have to encourage us to talk about ourselves." That's one Swedish trait, I think to myself, my family never outgrew.

We land on an isolated pebble beach on the southwest corner of Stora Kornö. The island looks deserted, but we hike about a mile into the hardwood forest to a 17th-century village. Yards sprouting daffodils front a cluster of 50 flawlessly restored

cottages. Most have been handed down from generation to generation. The scene is straight out of a storybook. I'm envious of the Swedes who never left. Söderholm tells me that to buy a cottage here today would cost at least a million dollars.

"In September, everyone comes here for lobster," he explains. "People are crazy about the lobster. They call it black gold."

Back on the beach, Olufsen pulls out a blanket and metal tubes of Swedish lunch staples: *räkokost* (cheese with shrimp bits) and *kaviar* (salted cod roe with mashed potatoes), which we spread on "polar" flatbread. Picnicking is by far my favorite tradition to cross the Atlantic: My mom has always claimed food tastes better in fresh air. But our smorgasbord meant smoked Lake Superior trout on white buns, with a side of potato salad.

I STILL NEED TO MAKE MY WAY through dense forests and across placid bays to Strömstad, to catch a high-speed ferry to the Koster Islands. Keeping a schedule seems ludicrous, but my urge to see the new park overrules and my lead foot prevails.

Almost. I arrive in Strömstad just in time to see the ferry pulling out of the harbor. But as I sit at a waterfront café drinking strong black coffee, I realize this historic spa town isn't a bad place to miss a boat. I watch a lithe, tall blond woman and her even taller blond husband stroll among teak rowboats and yachts in the harbor, languishing in the late spring lead-up to the midnight sun. I catch the night's last ferry, which skims over water smooth as glass to arrive on South Koster Island. My home for the night is the sprawling Hotel Koster, built in 1905 and waiting for me a hundred yards up the hill from the dock.

By 6 a.m. the next day, the sun is already high in the sky. I meet Stefan Husar, a ranger for Kosterhavet National Park, which was established a few years ago on the centennial of Europe's first national parks, a set of nine parks all in Sweden. In conjunction with Norway's adjoining Ytre Hvaler National Park, Kosterhavet protects a sprawl of ocean about the size of New York City that's home to some 6,000 marine species.

It's too cold to dive, so Husar leads me on an island tour by bicycle. "The most spectacular scenery is underwater," he says as we pedal through a meadow that will soon bloom with orchids and buttercups. But I'm content with the sights on land—old-timers pass us in motorized carts they use in place of cars, and the leaves on the birch trees are budding.

Next to Sweden's westernmost church, a cream-white rectangle with green trim and a weather vane topping the steeple, we park our bikes at the base of Valfjäll, or "whale mountain," the island's highest point. At the top of the granite monolith we can see a brick red lighthouse on a rock outcropping surrounded by frothing whitecaps. Beyond lies Norway. Husar seems embarrassed that he's run out of "special things" to show me.

"Swedes have a tradition to just be in nature," he says apologetically. "Most people come here to relax and swim and just be." No apology necessary. My ancestors left Sweden more than a century ago, but my ability to "just be" in nature is deeply embedded in my DNA. It's what I intend to do all afternoon.

STEPHANIE PEARSON lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is a contributing editor for *Outside* magazine. Stockholm-based photographer **CHRISTIAN ÅSLUND** grew up on Sweden's west coast. This is the first *Traveler* feature for both.

ON THE
IPAD

Enjoy more photographs of Sweden's Bohuslän Coast on our iPad edition, which is available for download from the App Store.

Sweden's West Coast

A FAVORITE OF the late Ingrid Bergman, the Bohuslän Coast feels a bit like a secret French Riviera. What the high-latitude region lacks in American tourists it makes up for with plentiful seafood and bright seasonal sunshine.

WHEN TO GO

If solitude and seafood are a priority, stick to late spring for oysters and late September for lobsters. Midsummer celebrations beginning in June linger through August, with vacationing Swedes filling the otherwise placid stillness with sailing, kayaking, and yachting.

WHERE TO EAT

The creamy mussel soup at **Brygghuset**

on Fiskebäckskil's harbor is worth the 20-minute ferry ride from Lysekil on its own. People-watching at this stop for passing yachts and sailors is a bonus—and so is the stroll to and from the ferry through cobblestoned streets lined with elegant pastel cottages.

With blue communal tables inside and overflowing produce and flower gardens out back, **Kosters**

Trädgårdar on South Koster Island looks like the backdrop of a Carl Larsson painting. Order the catch of the day and some local cheeses with island-grown berries and vegetables.

WHERE TO STAY

Strandflickorna Hotel in Lysekil was built at the turn of the 20th century as a spa retreat. That serenity endures in the backyard garden, wood-fired sauna, and outdoor tub overlooking the Gullmar Fjord. The Sea Studio has two glass walls and a deck with a ladder leading to the sea (doubles from \$276; studio from \$414).

The **Hotel Koster** has a large outdoor restaurant and a lawn where crowds listen to live music under the midnight sun, which is said to be brighter here on South Koster than anywhere else in Sweden. Occupying three different buildings, most of its 78 modern rooms offer views to the sea; breakfast is served in a historic mansion. Bike paths, beaches, and hiking trails start right out the front door (from \$193).

Stora Hotellet

Bryggan sits harbor-side in Fjällbacka, a 17th-century fishing village and also the hometown of present-day mystery novelist Camilla Läckberg. Nautically themed rooms have sunny terraces, and a seaside deck serves hot buns



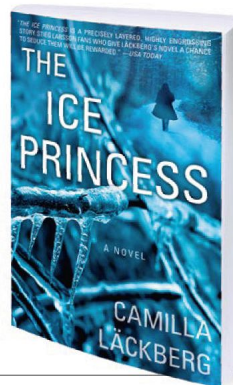
EXPLORE SEA WORLD

Based in Lysekil, Nautopp Seakayaking offers paddling tours (above), including day-trips to the outer Lysekil archipelago and longer journeys along the coastline, as well as kayak rentals (\$54 per day). Or join a seal safari on the *Soten*, a restored 60-foot luxury steamer from 1915 that departs from the Havets Hus aquarium in the Lysekil Harbor. Captain Göran Hahne, who began working on boats as a deckhand at age 12, is a walking encyclopedia of Swedish maritime and military history.

for breakfast and seafood for dinner (from \$263).

WHAT TO READ

Stick with what the Swedes do best: spine-chilling thrillers. All 12 of Läckberg's crime novels are set in Fjällbacka; *The Ice Princess* is her first and involves a body suspended in a bathtub of frozen water.



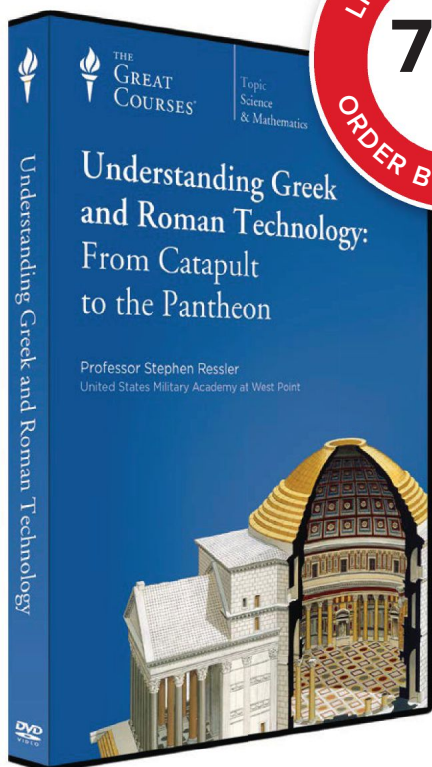
ATLAS



The Swedish Constitution legislates the tradition of *allmansrätten*—the right to roam on public and most private lands.

Sweden ranks third in thirsty coffee drinkers of the world, after the Netherlands and Finland.

Built in 1874, the Gothic-inspired structure that houses Gothenburg's indoor fish market is so beautiful it's called *Feskekörka*—"fish church."



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A TOAST TO GEORGIA

From the dynamic capital of Tbilisi to remote villages in the Caucasus, the wine-fueled feast means one thing: When you're here, you're family

The author and friends
watch as performers
show off a traditional
sword dance at Tbilisi
restaurant Phaetoni.



THE TABLE IS SET for the *supra*, the traditional feast around which all Georgian life revolves. A pig's head—pickled and stewed—stares up at us from the splintering wood. Bottles of pinecone-infused moonshine outnumber our plates.

Here in Ushguli, a community of 200 said to be the highest continuously inhabited village in Europe, tradition is paramount. While the rest of Georgia has been shaped by centuries of invasion—Russian, Turkish, and Persian neighbors have all left their marks—the remote, insular mountain province of Svaneti holds a mythical place in the national imagination as the *real* Georgia: untouched by time.

Our geriatric hosts, husband-and-wife proprietors of Ushguli's Chajashi Guesthouse, are mid-maelstrom: shouting at each other in a dialect so obscure even my Svan friend Giorgi Naveriani struggles to understand. I ask him what they're

to bless us all. Wicked Rezi wails in horror. The Virgin only blesses women, she cries. St. George blesses men. What has he been doing at university in Tbilisi, so far from home, that he has forgotten this basic tenet of tamada lore? She goes on chopping tomatoes with extravagant fury.

Giorgi rolls his eyes. "It's always like this in Svaneti." Sometimes, he says, it's easier to pretend to be a tourist than to bear the burden of the prodigal son.

Yaroslav takes over the toast. His voice is resonant, rhythmic, oracular. Giorgi translates. We are drinking to roots, to families, to the pasts that bind us, to Giorgi's Svan heritage and my own American lineage. We are toasting tradition and blood. We are toasting Georgia: eternal and unchanged.

THINGS MAY NOT CHANGE in Yaroslav's Georgia, but everything is changing in Giorgi's.

When I first encounter Giorgi in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, he is sporting skinny jeans and tie-dyed T-shirt, his long hair pulled back in a ponytail. He is the quintessential Tbilisi hipster: more at home deejaying in the city's dive bars than presiding over pigs' heads in Ushguli. "When I was growing up in Svaneti," he tells me, "people said I was a Satan worshipper because I liked rock music." Neighbors locked up their cats. "I couldn't wait to leave."

In Tbilisi—artistic, chaotic, dynamic—Giorgi is not bound by tradition's rules. He can be himself. The city embraces change—maybe too much so.

I'd spent three years off and on as an expat in Tbilisi, freelancing from a garden flat in the city's old town. I only reluctantly left to attend grad school in England. But there's a saying here: Those who get Georgia in the blood never truly leave.

And so I've found myself back

fighting about. "They're not fighting," he shrugs. "They're just Svan."

Giorgi has been entrusted with the toast. This is no mean honor. The orations of the *tamada*—equal parts best man and high priest—are the linchpin of the *supra*. Their order and content, fixed as a liturgy, connect each *supra* to the centuries of *supras* that have come before.

The guesthouse owners, Yaroslav Jincharadze and his wife, Rezi—"Wicked Rezi," her husband calls her—have never met us before. It doesn't matter. Giorgi is Svan; tradition is in his blood.

Giorgi swallows nervously before asking the Virgin Mary

here, trying to uncover the source of Georgia's hold over me. The city I first fell in love with—a labyrinth of crumbling art nouveau palaces and decaying, overgrown balconies—is now a pulsating metropolis of about 1.2 million, transformed virtually overnight by a wave of foreign investment and the aggressive building projects of former President Mikheil Saakashvili and his rival, former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili. A new

A baker in Mestia makes *tonis puri* bread with the help of his son (above). In Ushguli, Caucasus peaks loom over defensive towers that have withstood centuries of clan vendettas (opposite).









Near Kutaisi, Byzantine frescoes cover the walls of the Gelati Monastery, where visitors come to pray and kiss the icons.

funicular carries tourists up to the ruins of the ancient Narikala Fortress. A glass-walled casino hulks over the Kura River, its LCD screens casting an uncanny glow on the water. Meidan Square—once home to silversmiths and iconmakers—now overflows with the city’s sleekest bars.

After years in Tbilisi, I thought I’d grown used to the constant change: the pop-up art galleries and underground cafés that open, become habit, and close; the streets rerouted for construction so often that I forget where they originally led. But after almost a year away, the city’s glittering chaos shocks me.

At first I wonder if Georgia is changing too quickly for my liking. The places in fashion a year ago are now overrun with what Giorgi calls “those Georgians”—traditional, nationalist, homophobic; the artists and activists have decamped elsewhere.

Giorgi takes me to a self-proclaimed “ethnic” (read: international) bar called Canudos, dubiously located next to a strip club in the shadow of the Radisson hotel. The front garden, curved around a Soviet-era fountain, brims with Buddhist prayer flags, frayed hammocks, and what looks suspiciously like a *Star Wars* droid. A Georgian electro-punk band called Kung Fu Junkie—“my friends,” Giorgi grins—is playing on the radio. The crowd is a mixture of expats and artsy locals—tattooed, uniformly in black. A teenage girl cradles a stray kitten.

A young man rushes in, waving a pistol in the air.

For a moment, we are silent. The memory of Georgia a decade ago, with its bandits, its lawlessness, is palpable.

Then everyone bursts into laughter.

“Bang!” His friends mime death with varying degrees of melodrama. “Bang!”

“Of course it’s fake,” Giorgi says, incredulous at my fear. “They’re playing a game.”

The music gets louder. The kitten continues to make the rounds. “This place has gotten so mainstream,” Giorgi says with a sigh.

GIORGI’S TBILISI IS relentlessly modern. But as I wander through the backstreets of the 19th-century Sololaki district, I discover the beauty—and history—that first inspired me about this place. Some of the buildings I have loved, such as the famous blue house on Gudiashvili Square that was once home to Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, have been razed to make way for new projects. But others remain, touchstones of memory: The brick “mermaid house” in the Jewish Quarter, its wrought iron balconies molded into fishtails; the yellow Ottoman-style palace on Lado Asatiani Street, girdled by pomegranate trees; the brick bathhouses in the largely Azeri Muslim district of Abanotubani. Each house is a testament to a city shaped by centuries of foreigners who have, like me, come to make this place their own.

Across from the Ottoman house, an elderly man supervises the renovation of an art nouveau mansion. He tells me that he

ON THE
IPAD

View more images of Georgia’s capital and its rugged Svaneti region taken by photographer Massimo Bassano.

is transforming the ground floor into a high-end coffee shop, to sell “the good stuff” to discerning Tbilisians.

The location has a special meaning for him, he says; he had an apartment here while at university, rare in a culture where most young people live at home until marriage. It made him very popular, he says, winking. He has lived in Germany for years, but now it's time to return. The lure of this country is too strong to resist.

I tell him I understand.

BUT EVEN FOR GIORGI, Tbilisi is hardly the “real” Georgia. The essence of Georgian culture instead lies in the mountains, in the savage peaks of the Caucasus immortalized by 19th-century poets such as Alexander Kazbegi, who left a life of leisure in Tbilisi and St. Petersburg to become a shepherd in the mountain town of Stepantsminda.

Svaneti's legacy of danger has only added to its mystique. Until the late '90s, visiting the province was a foolish proposition. Those who survived the precarious 12-hour drive from Tbilisi risked robbery or worse from local bandit gangs. Even locals weren't safe: The defensive stone towers abutting most Svan houses have weathered centuries of clan vendettas and

blood debts. Svaneti might be celebrated in song, but it was rarely visited in person.

Giorgi offers to take me there.

Halfway on the daylong drive between Tbilisi and Svaneti's cultural hub, Mestia, we stop at the 12th-century Gelati Monastery, nestled among fig trees just outside the historic city of Kutaisi. Known as Georgia's “New Jerusalem,” Gelati was the nexus of the country's golden age, when the country's best poets, painters, and philosophers lived and worked here under the auspices of the great King David Agmashenebeli. Even today, it is among Georgia's most sacred places.

A service is beginning. Around us, women are lighting candles, whispering prayers. A priest sings the liturgy, his voice haunting, discordant. The Byzantine frescoes shimmer through a haze of incense. It surprises me to see Giorgi drop to his knees before an icon of the Virgin Mary and kiss the frame.

Later, I try to find a tactful way of asking Giorgi about his faith. He evades the question. “It's my country,” he says softly. “My history.”

AS WE ARRIVE IN MESTIA, I learn that even Svaneti is changing. A steel-and-glass airport welcomes daily flights



Some alfresco grooming takes place on Tbilisi's Lado Asatiani Street, in the Jewish Quarter. Opposite: An interactive LED display illuminates the new pedestrian-only Bridge of Peace, designed by an Italian architect, which spans the Kura River in Tbilisi.





In a Tbilisi church, and throughout Georgia, reverence for icons forms an integral part of cultural identity.

from Tbilisi; a new ski resort markets itself as a playground for the Georgian elite. The mountain views from Mestia's central square are obscured by a new chalet-style hotel. A combination of aid money, foreign investment, and an ambitious governmental push to transform Svaneti into the "Georgian Switzerland" has given Mestia the uncanny aura of a Hollywood back lot. Giorgi grimaces. "I hate it."

Even his childhood toys are behind glass. Giorgi used to spend his boyhood afternoons playing at the home of his best friend, the son of the director of the local ethnographic museum. Back then, the museum languished in disrepair, and the collection of historic Svan weaponry was piled up in boxes in his friend's attic, haphazard and uncataloged. Together they would sneak on the armor, spend their summers mock-fighting with real medieval swords.

Recently the museum reopened after years of renovation. Now the chain mail, the Circassian swords, the golden shield emblazoned with miniature wine jugs—all these are immaculately preserved in climate-controlled display cases, signposted in English, hawked over by guards.

"Things are so strict now," Giorgi says. "Not like it used to be." Georgia's old ways may irk him, I come to learn, but certain kinds of change irritate him even more.

Giorgi's relatives are everywhere. That night in Mestia we share an overgrown courtyard with his grandmother, mother, aunt, and three sisters, several chickens, two kittens, and a dog. No sooner do we decide to head to the nearby hamlet of Latali than Giorgi remembers a branch of his family he hasn't seen in years: His grandmother's sister, Mariko, and her children share a farm just off the main road.

He calls Mariko moments before we leave. By the time we arrive, minutes later, a savory meat pie already sizzles on the stove. This is, Giorgi reminds me, the Georgian way.

It is good that we have come today, Mariko announces. It is the day after St. Mary's Day, when families all over Georgia visit the churchyard graves of their loved ones, sharing their supras with those they have lost.

Latali has more churchyards than most. As Giorgi leads me up the dirt path to the 12th-century Church of the Archangel, I stop to look at the gravestones. The dead are predominantly male, predominantly young; casualties of the 1992-93 war in Abkhazia, of intra-clan conflict, of car accidents on unsurfaced mountain roads.

This hamlet was once a famous center of religious iconography; nearly each of these rickety cottages contains a priceless icon or two, stewarded through generations. Even the director of the local museum has failed to acquire them. "They'll sell their families," Giorgi says, "before they'll ever sell their icons."

THE NEXT DAY, WE HEAD deeper into the mountains to Ushguli, where Yaroslav and Wicked Rezi await us with their supra, their toasts. The three-hour drive takes us past carpets of wildflowers, effervescent streams, forested slopes that seem impossibly high until I catch a glimpse of distant Mount Shkhara, forked with snow, dwarfing them all. The grass, glinting golden in the light of early evening, shimmers over wild outcroppings of rock. Storm clouds cast cold shadows along the sides of the valley. We pull up at Yaroslav's guesthouse and

trade in our 4WD for a more traditional mode of transportation: a pair of sleek Ushguli horses that Yaroslav has obtained for us.

Astride, I follow Giorgi through the narrow streets. A group of piglets chase and nip at one another underfoot; dogs bark at our heels.

As we leave the road behind, the horses exult in their freedom, cantering in loping strides across the wildflower fields. Years in Tbilisi have not dulled Giorgi's instincts; he and the horse glide in unison, barreling headlong into the expanse of the valley. We are the only ones here for miles.

"This is what I love," Giorgi says. When he was a teenager, he wanted—"like all young Georgians"—to move out, to leave this place behind for good. But now he dreams of one day building a wooden house in rural Svaneti, of settling there in communion with the natural world.

After all, he says, this is home.

BACK IN TBILISI, the night before my departure, Giorgi and I plan one final supra at the restaurant Phaetoni, famous for its nightly performances of folk dance. Giorgi appears, in his trademark tie-dyed T-shirt and jeans. We are soon joined by Ana, an old friend of mine who has returned to Tbilisi after studying abroad.

Ana and Giorgi size each other up—comparing bars they frequent and activist rallies they've attended—and determine they are modern Georgians of a "similar mind-set." They share their ambivalence about supra culture—it's corny and outdated, they say, its toasts formulaic and insincere. They'd rather drink casually with friends than be chastised for toasting St. Mary instead of St. George.

But as platefuls of food arrive and the wine begins to flow, as the musicians strike up the first notes of the folk song "Lertsamisa Khesao" and the dancers, in their black *chokhas*, step onto the floor, their cynicism starts to fade. The dancers perform ever more elaborate acrobatic feats, building up to a frenetically choreographed duel with swords and shields: a traditional pas de deux from the mountains.

Families start to clap in time with the music; Ana and Giorgi are clapping too.

"You know," Giorgi says, as the musicians start up another well-known west Georgian song, "I thought about making a techno version of this one."

We eat with our fingers; we overfill our drinks. One group of revelers sends our table slices of their birthday cake; an Armenian family nearby sings along to a Soviet pop classic.

This is not Wicked Rezi's supra, nor the graveside supras the day after St. Mary's Day. We have no tamada; we make no toasts. We do not appeal to St. Mary or St. George. We speak English. We wear European clothes. We do not pour out sips of wine for the dead. But as we drink, as we sing, as we clink our glasses and cry "*Gaumarjos!*" we create our own feast. Out of a fractured array of traditions arises something new, something ours: a Georgia that, though untraditional, is no less real.

This is **TARA ISABELLA BURTON**'s first feature for *Traveler*. She recently completed a novel set in Georgia, *The Snake Eaters*. Frequent contributor **MASSIMO BASSANO** photographed Matera, Italy, for our September 2011 issue.



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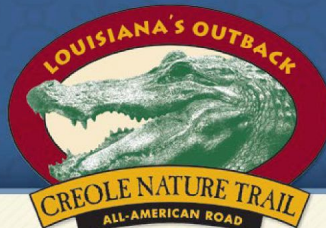
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Republic of Georgia

GEORGIANS SAY that when God divided Earth's land among its peoples, the Georgians showed up late, drunk. They'd been toasting and praising him, they said. God so liked this excuse that he gave them his own land: the most fertile of all.

WHERE TO EAT

Sofia Melnikova's Fantastic Duqani, like many of Tbilisi's best restaurants, is virtually unmarked (enter on Stambis Chikhi). Tucked away in a courtyard of pomegranate trees just behind the city's literature museum, the Duqani specializes in meat *khinkali* (dumplings).

The upscale **Pur Pur** serves European-Georgian fusion fare on the top floor of a dilapidated art nouveau mansion on Gudiashvili Square.

Restaurants are rare in Svaneti; most

guesthouses offer their guests three meals served family style—which might include dishes like *ajapsandali* (ratatouille) and *tashmijab* (potato and cheese porridge), almost impossible to find except in homes.

WHERE TO DRINK

Georgian wine—principally grown in the eastern region of Kakheti—has won praise throughout eastern Europe. Although a visit to one of Kakheti's wineries is the best way to experience Georgian viticulture, Tbilisi wineshop **Vinoteca**,

on Leselidze Street, boasts knowledgeable, English-speaking staff who provide free tastings.

WHERE TO STAY

In Tbilisi, the centrally located **Hotel Kopala** strikes a balance between modern comfort and authentic charm. The roof terrace, where breakfast is served, overlooks Narikala Fortress. From \$100.

Lodgings in Svaneti tend mostly toward family-run guesthouses. Just outside Mestia, **Irma Khergiani's Guesthouse** extends one of the warmest welcomes. Most of the furniture is hand-carved by the family's patriarch. +995-598-977238; \$25 including meals. In Ushguli, **Chajashi Guesthouse** reveals panoramic views of Svaneti's stone towers.



ART 101

WHERE ICONS POP

The Georgian tradition of religious icon-making stands among the most celebrated in the Orthodox world. In Svaneti, many icons remain in private homes, but visitors head to the Mestia Ethnographic Museum or the tenth-century Church of St. Quiricus in the village of Kala for their displays of medieval icons. In Tbilisi, shops on Leselidze Street sell contemporary examples.

+995-599-293463; \$35 including meals.

WHAT TO READ

Few novels capture the breathless sweep of the Caucasus as powerfully as *Ali & Nino*

(1937), by Kurban Said. The story follows its star-crossed protagonists from Tbilisi to Baku, Azerbaijan, in the waning days of the Russian Empire.



ATLAS



Tbilisi derives from the Georgian word for "warm," referring to the city's natural hot springs.

Georgians traditionally aged wine by burying sealed *qvevri*—distinctive clay jars—underground for five to six months.

All toasts are done with wine; beer is reserved for toasting one's enemies.



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**Boca Grande
Lighthouse,
built in 1890**

Beach Towns

Continued from page 52

nobody calls it that. It's nearly as much of a meeting place and gossip center as the post office, where the town gathers daily because there's no home mail delivery. Cannon and Nick are the only ones at the bar. "In about five minutes, this place will start to fill up," Nick says. It does, in a stream of ones and twos, nearly all of whom wander by to say hello.

Later we head across the grandiosely named Park Avenue for grouper at PJ's. Then it's back for a nightcap at The Temp. I'm tipsy when I leave, but the moon is high and bright and the bike sturdy and forgiving. I pedal the three blocks to the inn in a state of wistful melancholy, wondering what it might be like to be young and unencumbered and

living in this timeless town, or at least coming down for the season.

Ultimately, of course, what's timeless about a beach town is the beach. The next morning I ride to the inn's Beach Club, which isn't the prettiest coastal access on the island but is easily the most outfitted. I walk past the tiki bar and the lunch buffet, clamber down the seawall, and launch myself into the water. The sky overhead is spotted with clouds, while out toward Mexico it's the hue of molasses. The gulf has the roar and roll of an ocean. I swim a while. Then I settle into a whitewashed wooden chair and watch the weather come in, as it always has and always will.

Frequent contributor **BRUCE
SCHOENFELD** profiled Copenhagen
in the November 2013 issue.

Four More Classic Shore Towns

ENCINITAS, CALIF. Just half an hour up the coast from the sprawl of San Diego, this thriving town of 60,000 travels in its own orbit. A surf culture coexists with holistic healing centers, vegan groceries, and what seems like a yoga studio on every block. Even the chain hotels seem to be individually styled.

BETHANY/SOUTH BETHANY BEACH, DEL. These villages, which share a seven-mile stretch of beach, offer a

respite from the mass-scale tourism of this part of the Atlantic coast. They're known as the quiet resorts, and though the mood occasionally gets raucous between late June and Labor Day, it's an innocent 1950s kind of raucous.

GULF SHORES, ALA. Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill may have left their mark and the casino culture of nearby Biloxi/Gulfport may beckon, yet

Gulf Shores remains a languid, delightfully timeless place that feels like nowhere else. It's worth coming just to eat the seafood, and to visit the shimmering West Beach.

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH, N.C. A typical day here is two hours in a kayak paddling the marshlands, a grouper sandwich with slaw for lunch, an afternoon spent with a fishing rod, then a night out listening to a live country-rock band. —B.S.

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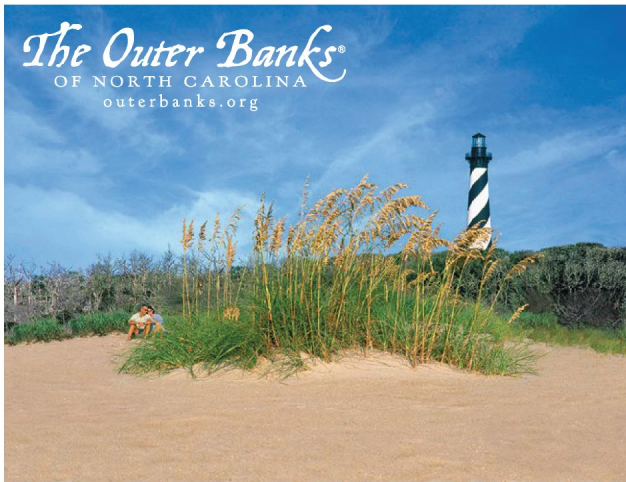
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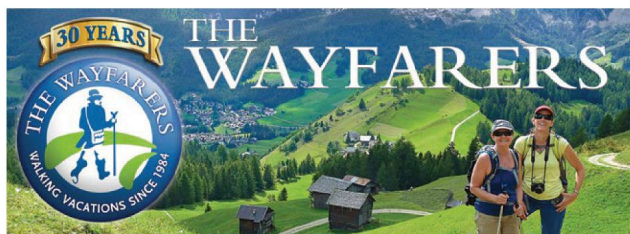


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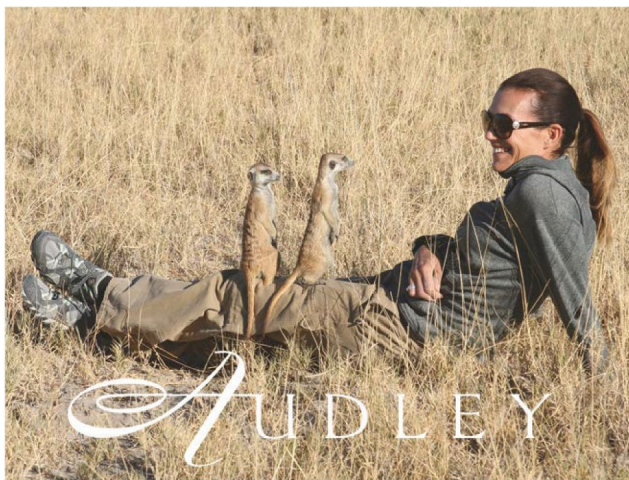


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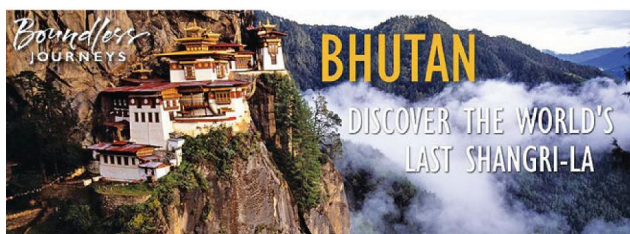
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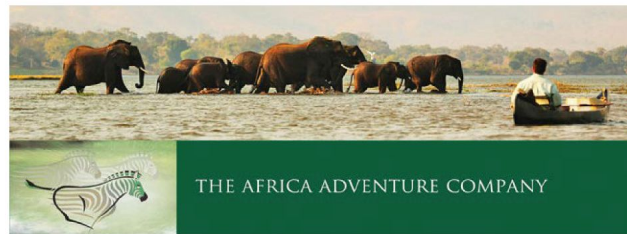
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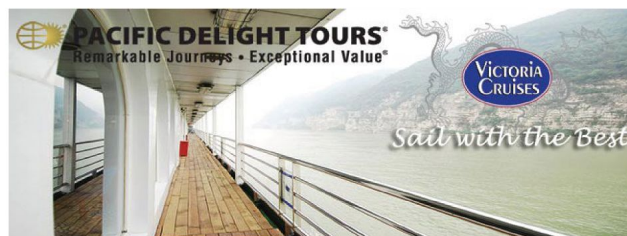


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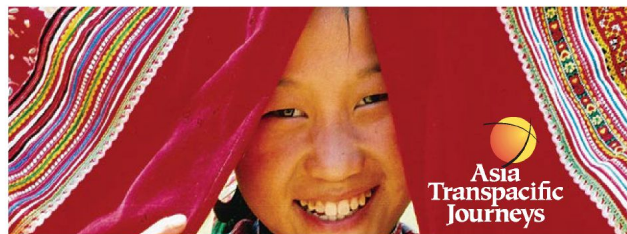
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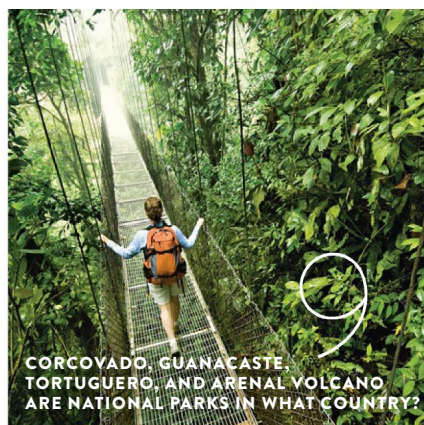
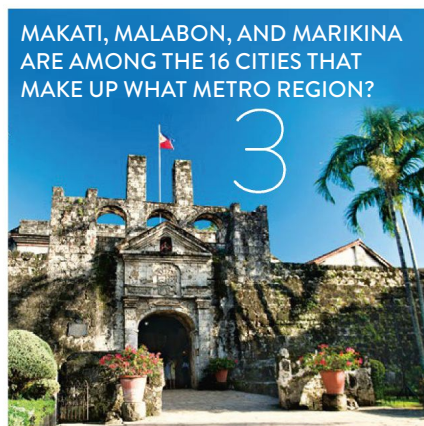
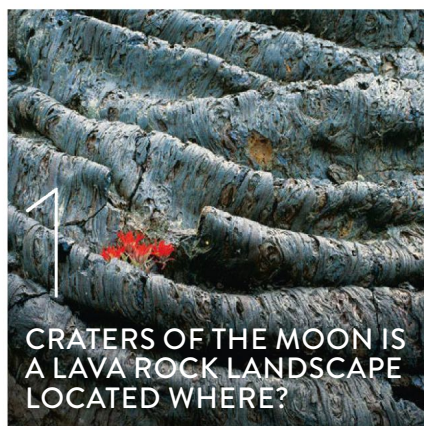
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A large seal is swimming underwater in clear blue water. The seal is positioned diagonally, with its head pointing towards the bottom right and its flippers extended upwards. The water is a vibrant blue, and there are some bubbles and light reflections visible. In the background, there are some small fish and a rocky seabed.

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